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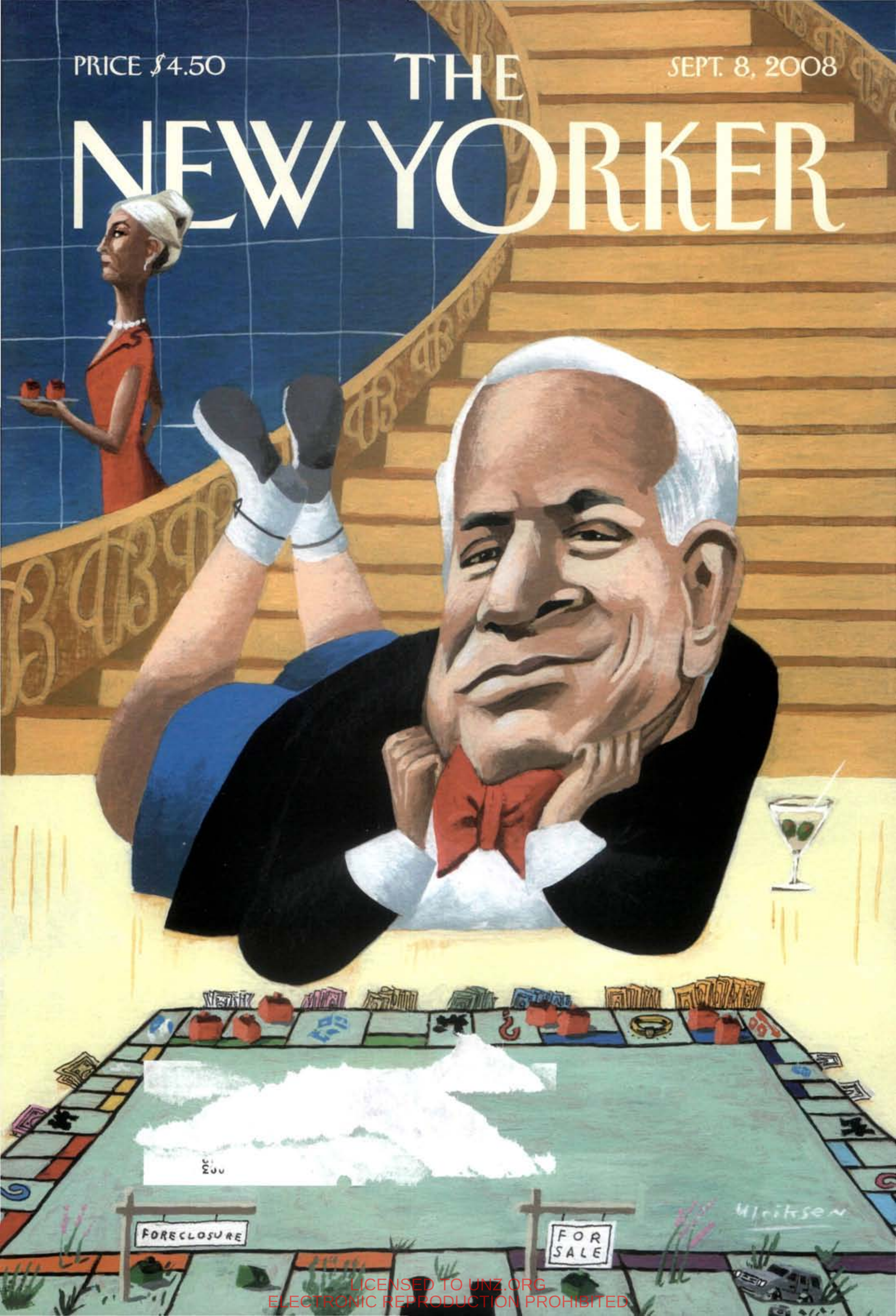
THE NEW YORKER

SEPT. 8, 2008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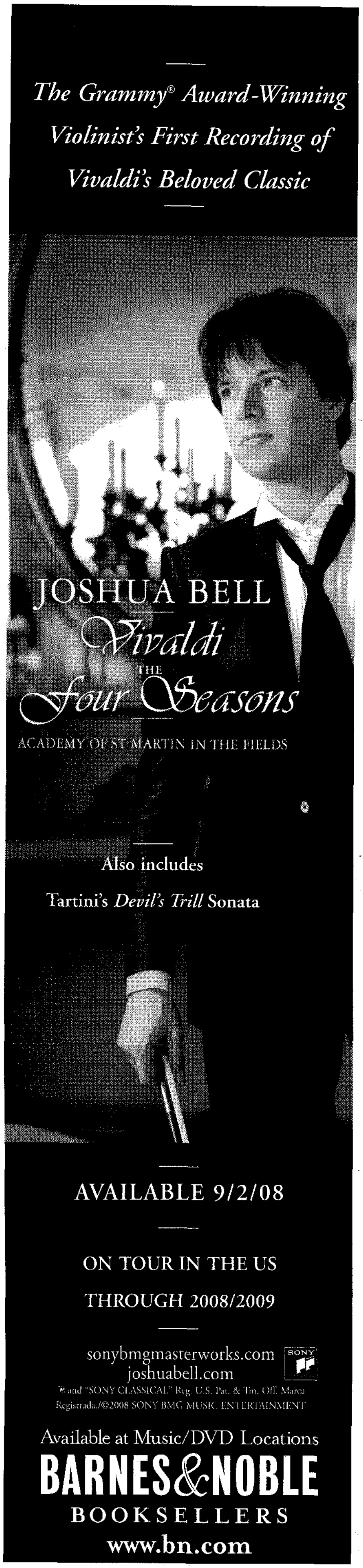

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THE NEW YORKER

SEPTEMBER 8, 2008

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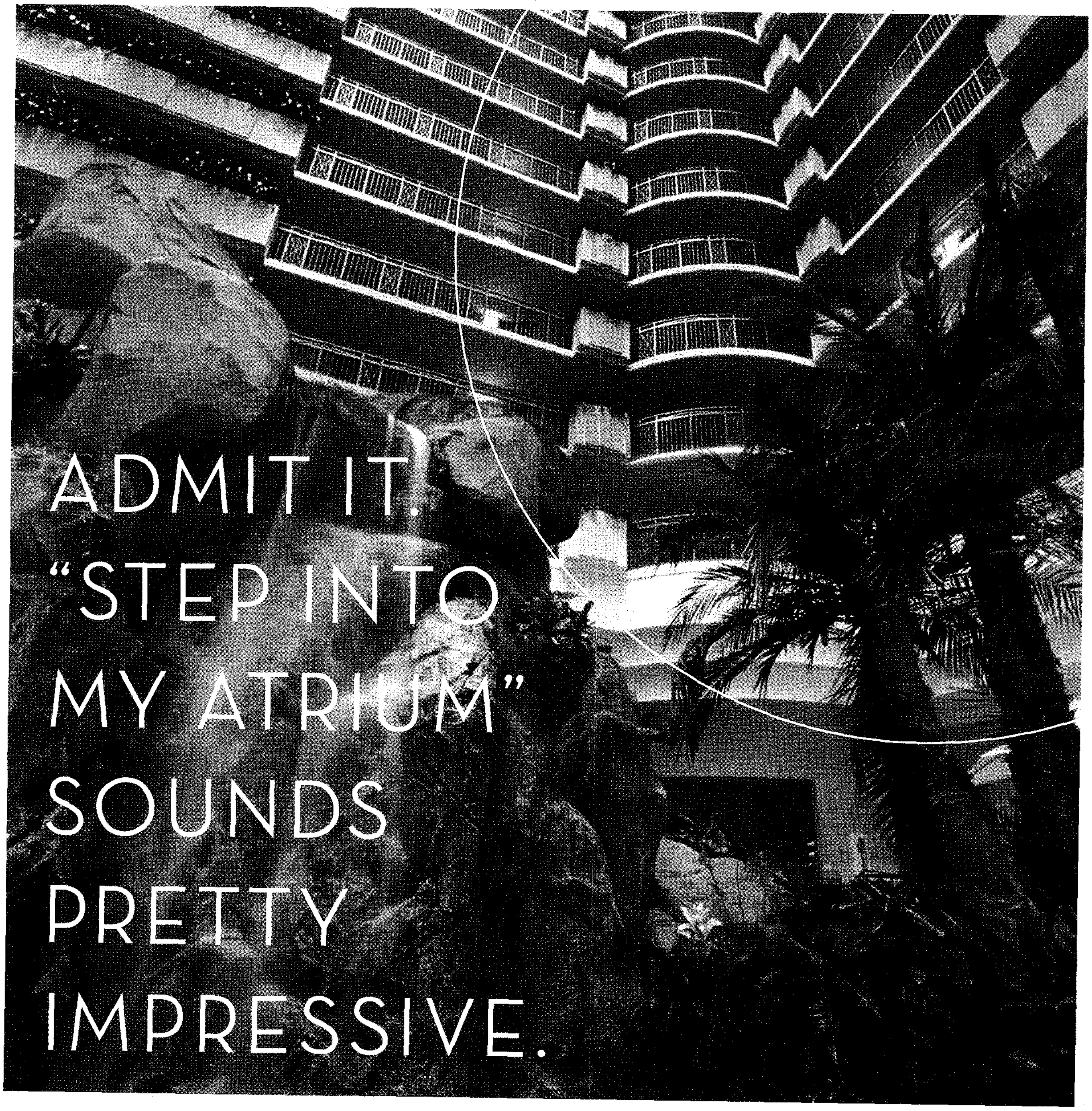

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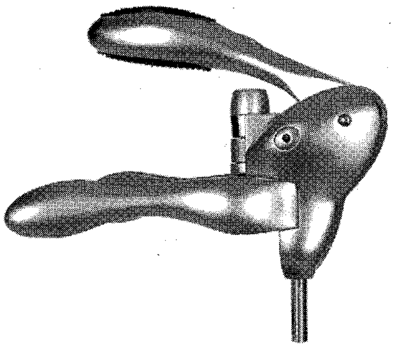

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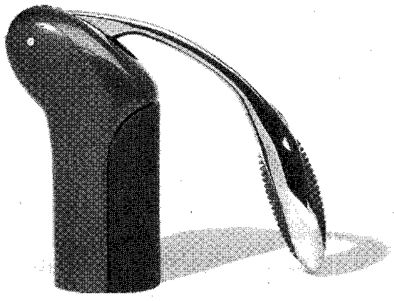

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CONTRIBUTORS

Peter J. Boyer ("Party Faithful," p. 24) has been a staff writer since 1992.

George Packer (The Talk of the Town, p. 21), the author of "The Assassins' Gate: America in Iraq," has edited two volumes of George Orwell's essays, "Facing Unpleasant Facts" and "All Art Is Propaganda," which will be published next month.

Mary Jo Bang (Poem, p. 29) has published five books of poems, including "Elegy," which was awarded the 2007 National Book Critics Circle Award for Poetry.

Amy Ozols (Shouts & Murmurs, p. 32) writes for the television game show "Who Wants to Be a Millionaire."

John Updike (A Critic at Large, p. 68) is the author of twenty-three novels, including "The Widows of Eastwick," which will be published in October. "Due Considerations," his sixth collection of essays and literary criticism, comes out in paperback later this month.

Mark Ulriksen (Cover), who has contributed to the magazine since 1993, is showing his work as part of a group exhibition at the San Francisco Convention and Visitors' Bureau.

Steve Coll ("The General's Dilemma," p. 34) is the president of the New America Foundation. His book "The Bin Ladens: An Arabian Family in the American Century" came out in April.

Ian Parker ("Why Me?," p. 48) has been writing for the magazine since 1994.

Dorothy Wickenden (The Talk of the Town, p. 22) is the executive editor of *The New Yorker.*

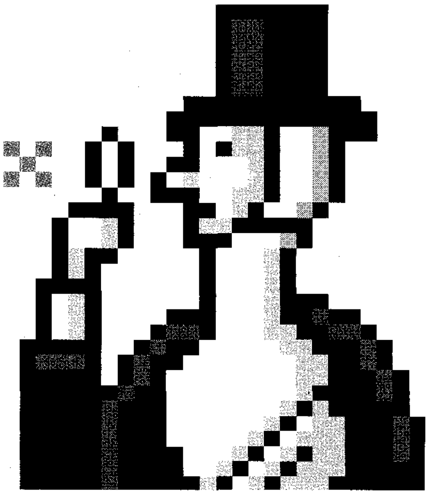
Yusef Komunyakaa (Poem, p. 52) won the Pulitzer Prize for Poetry in 1994. His thirteenth collection, "Warhorses," will be published in October.

Alice Munro (Fiction, p. 58) is the author of twelve short-story collections, including "Runaway" and "The View from Castle Rock," which came out in paperback earlier this year.

James Wood (Books, p. 76), a staff writer, is Professor of the Practice of Literary Criticism at Harvard. His book "How Fiction Works" was published in July.

Alex Ross (Musical Events, p. 79) is the author of "The Rest Is Noise: Listening to the Twentieth Century," which won the 2007 National Book Critics Circle Award for Criticism.

THIS WEEK ON NEWYORKER.COM
David Remnick hosts the Campaign Trail podcast. / Audio: *Steve Coll* on what General Petraeus has done for Iraq, and what he might do for Afghanistan and Pakistan. / Ask the Author: *Peter Boyer* takes readers' questions about the candidates and the religious vote. / From the archives: a selection of stories from Conventions past. / The Naked Campaign videos, featuring *Steve Brodner.* / Blogs by *Hendrik Hertzberg, George Packer,* and *Sasha Frere-Jones,* plus the Book Bench and the Cartoon Lounge. / Animated cartoons, the caption contest, and a list of *New Yorker* events.



THE MAIL

EVALUATING A CANDIDATE

Tavis Smiley certainly doesn't seem to know what he wants, or what to do about our current political situation ("What He Knows for Sure," by Kelefa Sanneh, August 4th). He merely seems to have many complaints, without presenting any alternatives. Smiley questions whether or not Obama truly represents the African-American community. But, if Obama attains such an esteemed office, he will not simply be President to his African-American constituents. African-American issues, while very important, are not the only thing he has to concern himself with.
Jeanette Hagar
Redding, Calif.

At Selma, Martin Luther King, Jr., made a transition from nonviolence as a philosophy to nonviolence as a tactic. What Smiley, Glenn Loury, and others need to understand is that Obama is asking African-Americans to make a similar transition in the twenty-first century. He is not asking us to give up our righteous anger; he's simply asking us to consider the possibility that our anger may be the primary barrier to our progress. It is no longer to our advantage to scare white people. On the streets of Chicago, Obama learned a basic lesson of the black South: you tell white folks only what you want them to know and you make it sound like what they want to hear.
Robert Hinton
Department of Social and Cultural Analysis
New York University
New York City

ADVANCED THEORIES

Benjamin Wallace-Wells, in writing about A. Garrett Lisi, notes that I said, "I am now convinced his theory doesn't work" ("Surfing the Universe," July 21st). I think space-time has important quantum structure and is even crystalline, as Newton and Fresnel thought. But Lisi's is not so much a physical theory as matériel for constructing one, and it is inappropriate to judge it at this early stage. The next step in theory construction, called quantization, is to turn on quantum indeterminacy. What I really reacted against, and the criticism applies to most current theories, is that the usual quantization method keeps the space-time continuum. But other methods convert the standard space-time continuum to something more atomistic, like a cosmic diamond film or a buckyball, and then Lisi's beloved E(8) might describe its unit cell. Einstein famously went through theories that didn't work on his way to one that did, and so do his successors. Fixing a theory that doesn't work is part of the job.
David Finkelstein
Professor Emeritus of Physics
Georgia Institute of Technology
Atlanta, Ga.

It's important not to romanticize the idea of beauty in science. The physicist Steven Weinberg once remarked that a racehorse breeder who says a horse is "beautiful" is just saying that this horse has something intangible in common with horses that have won lots of races. Physicists also use the term in this sense. When we see a beautiful theory, we experience an emotional surge of recognition—but it's not real, unless the theory goes on to predict many new experiments correctly. In other words, beauty is the part of efficacy that we cannot explain, but can nevertheless perceive. Its pursuit exacts a steep price, but Einstein (and, for that matter, Weinberg) succeeded repeatedly. Scientists committed to meeting the rigorous demand of capturing complex reality in a compact way can still get their glimpses of beauty, regardless of whether they enjoy insider status.
Philip Nelson
Department of Physics and Astronomy
University of Pennsylvania
Philadelphia, Pa.

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GOINGS ON ABOUT TOWN

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THIS WEEK

THE THEATRE
BRAVE OLD WORLD

Mandy Patinkin, who got his break on Broadway in 1978, in "Evita," has an extensive list of film and television credits ("Yentl," "Chicago Hope"), not to mention a recording career. Patinkin stars as Prospero in Classic Stage Company's season opener, "The Tempest." (See page 8.)

NIGHT LIFE
BIG TENT

Some will respond to the national political conventions by going out and organizing, others by staying home and turning off their televisions. The Citizens Band, a politically minded collective of musicians, actors, and performance artists, has a show, "The Panic Is On," at the Spiegeltent. It finds the vaudevillian ensemble addressing such timely issues as war, immigration, xenophobia, and poverty. (See page 10.)

ART
SCROLL PLAY

Wang Hui (1632-1717) was the greatest landscape painter of late imperial China, renowned for his expressive brushwork and synthesis of historical styles. "Landscapes Clear and Radiant," at the Met, traces Wang's development through twenty-seven works, including eleven never before seen in the West. (See page 11.)

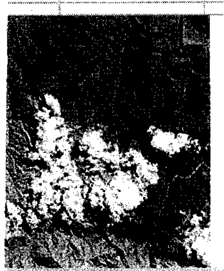
MOVIES
SCREEN MEMORIES

A pair of familiar cinematic treasures will be back on the big screen for weeklong runs. From Sept. 5 to 11, Alfred Hitchcock's "The 39 Steps" will be playing at BAM, and François Truffaut's "Shoot the Piano Player," starring Charles Aznavour, will be at Film Forum. (See page 16.)

READINGS AND TALKS
SHEA IT ISN'T SO

The Mets are moving out of Shea Stadium at the end of this baseball season, bringing to a close more than four decades of baseball at the Corona, Queens, landmark. Before Shea is shuttered and the adjacent Citi Field opens, some team legends—Keith Hernandez, Darryl Strawberry, and Ron Darling—and the announcer Gary Cohen reminisce at the 92nd Street Y. (See page 17.)

Backstage at "Elizabeth Rex," at Center Stage. Photograph by Landon Nordeman.



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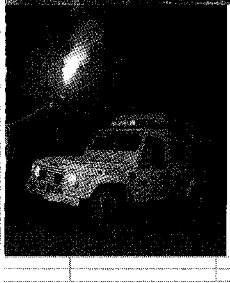

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THE THEATRE
OPENINGS AND PREVIEWS

Please call the phone number listed with the theatre for timetables and ticket information.

BEAST
New York Theatre Workshop opens its season with a new comedy by Michael Weller, about two Iraq-war veterans who journey to Crawford, Texas, to confront the President. Jo Bonney directs. In previews. (79 E. 4th St. 212-239-6200.)

CELEBRITY AUTOBIOGRAPHY: IN THEIR OWN WORDS
The cabaret featuring actors reading the written works of celebrities returns to the Triad. Opens Sept. 8. (158 W. 72nd St. 212-868-4444.)

ENTER LAUGHING
Joseph Stein wrote the book and Stan Daniels wrote the music and lyrics for this musical, based on Carl Reiner's semi-autobiographical novel from 1958, about an aspiring actor who has no talent. Stuart Ross directs. Previews begin Sept. 3. (Saint Peter's Theatre, Lexington Ave. and 54th St. 212-935-5820.)

EQUUS
Daniel Radcliffe, Richard Griffiths, and Kate Mulgrew star in Peter Shaffer's 1974 drama, about a disturbed teen-ager and his psychiatrist. Thea Sharrock directs. Previews begin Sept. 5. (Broadhurst, 235 W. 44th St. 212-239-6200.)

FELA!
Bill T. Jones directs and choreographs a new musical about the Nigerian composer, performer, and political activist Fela Anikulapo Kuti. With a book by Jim Lewis and Jones and additional lyrics by Lewis. Kuti's music will be performed by Antibalas. In previews. Opens Sept. 4. (37 Arts, 450 W. 37th St. 212-560-8912.)

THE GLASS CAGE
The Mint presents the U.S. première of J. B. Priestley's drama, about a family whose youngest son brings his Native American wife and her siblings home for a visit. Lou Jacob directs. Previews begin Sept. 4. (311 W. 43rd St. 212-315-0231.)

THE INVITATION
John Clancy directs this dark comedy, by Brian Parks, about a high-society dinner party that goes south. Previews begin Sept. 5. (Ohio, 66 Wooster St. 212-868-4444.)

IRENA'S VOW
Tovah Feldshuh stars in a new play by Dan Gordon, based on the true story of a woman who worked as head housekeeper for a German officer in Occupied Poland during the Second World War and went on to shelter Jewish refugees. Previews begin Sept. 7. (Baruch Performing Arts Center, E. 25th St. between Lexington Ave. and Third Ave. 212-352-3101.)

JOHNNY ON A SPOT
The Peccadillo Theatre Company, now the resident company at Theatre at St. Clement's, presents a political satire by Charles MacArthur, about a Senate candidate who dies in a brothel and the campaign manager who tries to get him elected anyway. Previews begin Sept. 4. Opens Sept. 8. (423 W. 46th St. 212-352-3101.)

KING OF SHADOWS
Working Theatre presents the world première of a new play by Roberto Aguirre-Sacasa, about a teen-age hustler and a social worker who takes him in. Connie Grappo directs. In previews. Opens Sept. 7. (Theatre for the New City, 155 First Ave. 212-868-4444.)

LADY
Craig Wright's drama, about the reunion of three childhood friends with differing political views, opens the season for the Rattlestick Playwrights Theatre. Dexter Bullard ("Bug") directs. In previews. Opens Sept. 8. (224 Waverly Pl. 212-868-4444.)

THE MARVELOUS WONDERETTES
Roger Bean wrote and directs this fifties-era jukebox musical, centered on four girls at their high-school prom. In previews. (Westside Theatre, 407 W. 43rd St. 212-239-6200.)

MASQUE OF THE RED DEATH
Zombie Joe's Underground Theatre Group presents stagings of three Edgar Allan Poe stories: "Masque of the Red Death," "The Tell-Tale Heart," and "The Bells." Opens Sept. 3. (St. Luke's, 308 W. 46th St. 212-239-6200.)

NANABOZHO
Ralph Lee's Mettawee River Theatre Company stages a puppet play, about the Winnebago tribe's story of creation. Opens Sept. 5. (The outdoor garden of St. John the Divine, 111th St. and Amsterdam Ave. 212-929-4777.)

A NUMBER
The Clockwork Theatre presents a drama by Caryl Churchill, in which a man who has cloned his child must face the results. Previews begin Sept. 6. (Beckett, 410 W. 42nd St. 212-279-4200.)

THE QUARREL
David Brandes and Joseph Telushkin adapted their film for this drama, about two estranged friends, both of whom are Holocaust survivors. In previews. Opens Sept. 7. (DR2, at 103 E. 15th St. 212-239-6200.)

The new night club Santos Party House.

FRANK STOCKTON

A TALE OF TWO CITIES
Jill Santoriello wrote the book, music, and lyrics for this musical adaptation of the Dickens novel. Warren Carlyle directs and choreographs. In previews. (Hirschfeld, 302 W. 45th St. 212-239-6200.)

THE TEMPEST
Mandy Patinkin stars in the Shakespeare romance at Classic Stage Company. Brian Kulick directs. Previews begin Sept. 3. (136 E. 13th St. 212-352-3101.)

THREE CHANGES
Playwrights Horizons kicks off its season with the world première of a play by Nicky Silver, about an Upper West Side couple who get a visit from the husband's Hollywood-based brother. Wilson Milam ("The Lieutenant of Inishmore") directs. Starring Aya Cash, Scott Cohen, Dylan McDermott, Brian J. Smith, and Maura Tierney. In previews. (416 W. 42nd St. 212-279-4200.)

WHAT'S THAT SMELL: THE MUSIC OF JACOB STERLING
The world première of a comedy written and performed by David Pittu ("Is He Dead?"), a satire about a fictional musical-theatre composer, with music by Randy Redd. In previews. (Atlantic Stage 2, at 330 W. 16th St. 212-279-4200.)

NOW PLAYING

ABSINTHE
The Spiegeltent's headlining event—a raunchy circus full of erotically charged acrobatics and variety acts—returns for its third year. Many of last summer's performers are back, including the Gazillionaire, an impresario with a gold tooth and a giant crotch, and the downtown burlesque sprite Julie Atlas Muz; if you haven't seen her climb full-body into a balloon, now's your chance. Audience members in the first row are likely to be groped by a drunken chanteuse by the name of Kaye Tuckerman. But the evening's most winning performers aren't even of boozing age: the Anastasini brothers, the elder of whom is able to kick the younger (a toothy ten-year-old) in circles like a load of laundry. (South Street Seaport, Pier 17. 212-279-4200.)

DÉSIR
Wayne Harrison's intimately scaled evening of cirque acts doesn't live up to its billing: it's no swoon through the seamy byways of a turn-of-the-century Paris night club. The Boucheron jewels and ab-baring costumes cloak a thinly disguised variety show. Still, some of the acts have real zing. When the four-man acrobat team catapults its smallest member up into the rafters, the front row flinches, and the hula-hoop dancer Marawa Ibrahim shimmies and winks with infectious enthusiasm. Their unbridled brio stands in sharp contrast to the show's unsatisfying attempts at titillation and humor, which feel strangely halfhearted for a louche downtown venue like the Spiegeltent. (South Street Seaport, Pier 17. 212-279-4200.)

ELIZABETH REX
It's no small feat to write an entertaining, reasonably convincing play about a night that William Shakespeare (Scott Nogi), his acting company, and Queen Elizabeth spend together in a barn, hamming it up and having it out, but the late Timothy Findley did just that. After the actors perform for the Queen, she visits them to distract herself from thinking about the Earl of Essex, her secret love, who will be executed in the morning. As the Queen, Stephanie Barton-Farcas is both commanding and subtle; her foil, the fearless female-role actor Ned Lowenscroft, is superbly played by Michael DiGioia. The play has much to say about role-playing and gender; that it says it too loudly and too often is a quibble. The uniformly strong cast is directed by Joanne Zipay. (Center Stage, 48 W. 21st St. 212-352-3101. Through Sept. 6.)

THE FIRST BREEZE OF SUMMER
In Leslie Lee's 1975 melodrama (presented by Signature Theatre Company, under the direction of Ruben Santiago-Hudson), Milton and Hattie Edwards (Keith Randolph Smith and Marva Hicks) are God-fearing, hardworking Negroes who run a construction business somewhere in the Northeast. They have two sons: the competitive, woman-loving, twenty-something Nate (Brandon Dirden), and his bookish, closeted teen-age brother, Lou (Jason Dirden). On a hot, suffocating summer day, they receive a visit from Milton's mother, Gremmar (Leslie Uggams), and her daughter, Edna (the brilliant, irrepressible Brenda Pressley), and Gremmar recalls the three love affairs that punctuate the present-day action of the script. Yaya DaCosta, who plays the young Gremmar in the flashback segments, has an inordinate desire to live up to the part, but she fails to stimulate the three exceptional actors who

play her lovers. However, Pressley's performance sends us to the stratosphere; she doesn't so much act her role as live it, in a way that overwhelms the entire production—and makes clear its shortcomings. (Reviewed in our issue of 9/1/08.) (Peter Norton Space, 555 W. 42nd St. 212-244-7529.)

FRINGENYC ENCORE SERIES
Select Fringe Festival favorites, in repertory at SoHo Playhouse (15 Vandam St.) and at Barrow Street Theatre (27 Barrow St.). (212-691-1555.)

HAIR: THE AMERICAN TRIBAL LOVE ROCK MUSICAL
Since it stormed the Public Theatre, in 1967, James Rado, Gerome Ragni, and Galt MacDermot's musical has become as much of a cultural artifact as the mood ring, so it's a daunting show to revive. Diane Paulus's production succeeds by keeping the highs high—try to resist Will Swenson, as Berger, climbing over your seat in a fringed loincloth—but even more so by tapping into the core of ambivalence that makes "Hair" more than a hippie Renaissance fair. By the time the audience is invited to rush the stage for "Let the Sun Shine In," we know what's fuelling this far-out dance party: the dread, the heartache, and the terror-stricken defiance of the draft-card era. (Delacorte Theatre, Central Park, near W. 81st St. For information about free tickets, which are required, call 212-539-8750.)

[TITLE OF SHOW]
A meta-musical about two guys trying to write a musical may sound suspect, but the result, with a book by Hunter Bell and music and lyrics by Jeff Bowen, who also star, turns out to be a joy from start to finish—original, clever, and surprisingly moving. Bell and Bowen, joined by their actress friends (and now co-stars) Susan Blackwell and Heidi Blickenstaff, create a musical in three weeks and submit it to a festival; brainstorming sessions, foulmouthed pep talks, jokes about drag-queen names and Broadway flops, and an in-song argument about whether "sweeter" rhymes with "theatre" all make it into the show, as does each new chapter in its progression from idea to possible hit. That we know the ending—we're watching it on Broadway—only heightens the fun. (Lyceum, 149 W. 45th St. 212-239-6200.)

Also Playing

ARIAS WITH A TWIST: HERE Arts Center, 145 Sixth Ave., near Spring St. 212-352-3101. **AROUND THE WORLD IN 80 DAYS:** Irish Repertory, 132 W. 22nd St. 212-727-2737. **AUGUST: OSAGE COUNTY:** Music Box, 239 W. 45th St. 212-239-6200. **AVENUE Q:** Golden, 252 W. 45th St. 212-239-6200. **BOEING-BOEING:** Longacre, 220 W. 48th St. 212-239-6200. **CHICAGO:** Ambassador, 219 W. 49th St. 212-239-6200. **EAST 14TH:** New World Stages, 340 W. 50th St. 212-239-6200. Through Sept. 6. **GYPSY:** St. James, 246 W. 44th St. 212-239-6200. **HAIRSPRAY:** Neil Simon, 250 W. 52nd St. 212-307-4100. **IN THE HEIGHTS:** Richard Rodgers, 226 W. 46th St. 212-239-6200. **JERSEY BOYS:** August Wilson, 245 W. 52nd St. 212-239-6200. **LEGALLY BLONDE THE MUSICAL:** Palace, Broadway at 47th St. 212-307-4100. **THE LION KING:** Minskoff, 200 W. 45th St. 212-307-4747. **THE LITTLE MERMAID:** Lunt-Fontanne, 205 W. 46th St. 212-307-4747. **MAMMA MIA!:** Winter Garden, Broadway at 50th St. 212-239-6200. **THE MARRIAGE OF BETTE AND BOO:** Laura Pels, 111 W. 46th St. 212-719-1300. Through Sept. 7. **MARY POPPINS:** New Amsterdam, 214 W. 42nd St. 212-307-4747. **MONTY PYTHON'S SPAMALOT:** Shubert, 225 W. 44th St. 212-239-6200. **RENT:** Nederlander, 208 W. 41st St. 212-307-4100. Through Sept. 7. **SOUTH PACIFIC:** Vivian Beaumont, Lincoln Center. 212-239-6200. **SPRING AWAKENING:** Eugene O'Neill, 230 W. 49th St. 212-239-6200. **THE 39 STEPS:** Cort, 138 W. 48th St. 212-239-6200. **WICKED:** Gershwin, 222 W. 51st St. 212-307-4100. **XANADU:** Helen Hayes, 240 W. 44th St. 212-239-6200.

NIGHT LIFE
ROCK AND POP

Musicians and night-club proprietors live complicated lives; it's advisable to call ahead to confirm engagements.

B. B. KING BLUES CLUB & GRILL
237 W. 42nd St. (212-997-4144)—Sept. 4: **Bonnie Tyler.** Despite her thirty years in the music business, the husky-voiced Welsh songstress is inarguably best known for her histrionic ballad from 1983, "Total Eclipse of the Heart," produced by the Meat Loaf associate Jim Steinman. While Tyler scored hits before and after (notably "It's a Heartache" and "Holding Out for a Hero"), that song remains her calling card.

FILLMORE NEW YORK AT IRVING PLAZA
17 Irving Pl., at 15th St. (212-777-6800)—Sept. 4: The British rapper, writer, and producer **Tricky** (a.k.a. Adrian Thaws) embellishes slow, sexy beats with found sounds—plinking keyboard loops, metallic guitars, industrial grind, and so on. The result is dense, spare, and soulful; it's soothing yet vaguely disturbing, like a good romance.

HIGHLINE BALLROOM
431 W. 16th St. (212-414-5994)—Sept. 3: **Miles Hunt,** the front man for the Wonder Stuff, per-

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CRITIC'S NOTEBOOK
PEOPLE'S DANCE

For anyone who doesn't know about it by now, the Fall for Dance Festival is a two-week series that takes place every September, at City Center, and has a notable entry fee: ten dollars a seat, every seat. City Center was once a Shriners auditorium. After our municipality bought it, for back taxes, in 1943, Mayor LaGuardia proposed to turn it into a "people's theatre." And when Arlene Shuler, City Center's current president, founded Fall for Dance, in 2004, her goal was to return to that mandate. The shows are pitched at people new to dance, so there's a lot of variety: four to five companies a night. You won't get dead-assed by something you don't like, or not for longer than twenty minutes. And the troupes tend to do their most audience-friendly works. The festival sells out every night, so if you want to go you have to indicate that, by phone (212-581-1212), on the Web (www.nycitycenter.org), or at the box office, immediately after the tickets go on sale—this year, on September 7 at 11 A.M.

—Joan Acocella

forms his solo material. With **Wayne Hussey,** formerly of the goth stalwarts the Mission and Sisters of Mercy. Sept. 8: **Sons & Daughters,** from Glasgow, features two former associates of the melancholic Scottish band Arab Strap. They made their début in 2003 with an EP, "Love the Cup," that paid tribute to Johnny Cash and embraced the big, bad American West. They maintained the Man in Black's hard-edged attitude on their follow-up album, "The Repulsion Box," from 2005. Their new release, "This Gift," was produced by the ex-Suede guitarist Bernard Butler, and it takes a stab at well-rounded pop.

MERCURY LOUNGE
217 E. Houston St. (212-260-4700)—Sept. 4: The San Diego-based group **Delta Spirit** mixes Northern soul with old-school folk for a refreshing sound on its new album, "Ode to Sunshine."

MUSIC HALL OF WILLIAMSBURG
66 N. 6th St., Williamsburg, Brooklyn (718-486-5400)—Sept. 6: The **Silver Jews,** the work of the poet and songwriter David Berman, have been playing noisy, inspired, and extremely literate post-punk off and on since 1990. The core band started with Berman, Stephen Malkmus, and Bob Nastanovich (both of Pavement), although the lineup has changed almost continuously. Despite holding the band together, Berman has rarely toured. He took to the road two years ago, in support of the album "Tanglewood Numbers," and he's back now with songs from the band's latest release, "Lookout Mountain, Lookout Sea," a sparkling collection of country-tinged rock.

ROSELAND
239 W. 52nd St. (212-307-7171)—Sept. 5: The **Fratellis,** a high-energy band from Glasgow, deliver a brash, highly melodic guitar attack with grit and vigor, calling to mind their forebears in the Jam and early Who. The group, which has a colorful take on the old rock-song standbys of girl trouble and romance, recently released its second album, "Here We Stand."

SANTOS PARTY HOUSE
100 Lafayette St. (212-584-5492)—The brainchild of Andrew W.K. (born Andrew Wilkes-Krier), the rocker who first made a splash with songs like "It's Time to Party," "Party Hard," and "Party Til You Puke," this Spartan eight-thousand-square-foot, bi-level temple of dancing, romancing, and, er, partying, has been in the works for three years, and though it's now operating seven nights a week, it has yet to have its official grand-opening party. But that's not because Andrew W.K., who put the space together with three friends (the artist Spencer Sweeney, the night-life impresario Larry Golden, and the architect and restaurateur Ron Castellano), has been lazy. In addition to his performing career, he's also a producer—he just co-produced the reggae legend Lee (Scratch) Perry's latest album, "Repentance,"—and, of all things, a much sought-after motivational speaker. D.j.s get the crowd moving nightly, and rock shows and art events are planned for later this fall. The club itself, which has also, briefly, been known as 100 Lafayette and Santa's Party House, has a wicked sound system and a wallet-friendly no-mandatory-bottle-service policy. After all, one of Andrew W.K.'s other signature songs is the anthem "I Love NYC."

SPIEGELTENT
Pier 17, South Street Seaport (212-279-4200)—Sept. 7-9: The **Citizens Band**—a politically minded collective of musicians, actors, and performance artists that came together in response to the results of the 2004 election—has addressed issues like health care and the environment in dazzlingly decadent, Weimar-cabaret-style productions. The troupe performs its sixth show, "The Panic Is On" (premièred late last year at Ars Nova), an id-and-underbelly extravaganza of song and dance, longings and fears. While most of the songs sound vintage, the themes—war, poverty, xenophobia—are all too resonant in today's age of anxieties. The glittery cast features the trapeze artists **Sarah Sophie Flicker** and **Chelsea Bacon** and the vocal divas **Rachelle Garniez** and **Angela McClusky.** They will be joined by two special guests for these performances, **Nina Persson,** of the Cardigans, and **Amanda Palmer,** of the Dresden Dolls.

WEBSTER HALL
125 E. 11th St. (212-353-1600)—Sept. 9: The **Stereophonics.** Though well established in Europe, this Welsh trio with a thing for burly alternative rock has yet to properly crack the States. Their more recent albums have shown that they are capable of more than simple guitar-based clamor.

JAZZ AND STANDARDS

ABRONS ARTS CENTER
466 Grand St., at Pitt St. (212-598-0400)—Sept. 6: The pianist Misha Mengelberg and the drummer Han Bennink walk a thin line between musical genius and madness with their wonderfully unclassifiable, ten-piece **ICP (Instant Composers Pool) Orchestra.** Among the band's exceptional, if gloriously unruly, soloists are Michael Moore, on woodwinds, and Tristan Honsinger, on cello.

BIRDLAND
315 W. 44th St. (212-581-3080)—Sept. 3-6: The **John Abercrombie** quartet. The invigorating interaction that the guitarist Abercrombie delivers with his live ensembles mirrors the consistent excellence of his ECM recordings of the past few decades.

BLUE NOTE
131 W. 3rd St., near Sixth Ave. (212-475-8592)—It may be news to most that fusion is hip again (witness the attention the Return to Forever reunion garnered last month), but not to the drummer **Billy Cobham,** who has been waving the banner of virtuosic excess ever since leaving the Mahavishnu Orchestra, in the mid-seventies. His Spectrum Band (here Sept. 2-7) includes the bassist **Victor Bailey,** a mainstay of late-edition Weather Report.

DIZZY'S CLUB COCA-COLA
Broadway at 60th St. (212-258-9595)—Sept. 1-2: In **Edmar Castaneda's** hands, the Colombian harp becomes a viable instrument for jazz improvisation. Sept. 3-8: The guitarist **Kenny Burrell,** a longtime master who mingles silky tones with bluesy ardor, fronts a quintet that includes the solid support of the bassist **Peter Washington.**

FEINSTEIN'S AT LOEWS REGENCY
540 Park Ave., at 61st St. (212-339-4095)—**Michael Feinstein's** new album, "The Sinatra Project," is a reminder that the Chairman of the Board had an exceptional ear for quality songs. Feinstein, the contemporary king of cabaret who is celebrating his tenth anniversary here Sept. 2-6 (accompanied by a seventeen-piece big band that includes the guitarist **Bucky Pizzarelli**), brings a sharp sense of individuality to the near-patented material.

IRIDIUM
1650 Broadway, at 51st St. (212-582-2121)—Sept. 4-7: Still going strong some forty years after laying the groundwork for fusion guitar, **Larry Coryell** hooks up with the keen young organist **Sam Yahel** and the veteran drummer **Al Foster.** Mondays belong to the electric-guitar innovator **Les Paul.** The **Mingus Big Band** takes over on Tuesdays.

(LE) POISSON ROUGE
158 Bleecker St. (212-796-0741)—Sept. 4: Three players who are always willing to startle an audience—the saxophonist **John Zorn,** the bassist **Bill Laswell,** and the drummer **Milford Graves**—stir up free-jazz trouble. The faint of heart should sit this one out.

THE STONE
Avenue C at 2nd St. (No phone)—Sept. 5: Steven Bernstein's **Sex Mob** goes for an all-out groovefest before heading to Jazz à la Villette, in Paris, where it'll cross streams onstage with fellow pop-meets-jazz artists the Bad Plus at the

DANIELA SCHÜTT POZZO

Cité de la Musique, later this month. Sept. 9: **Okkyung Lee,** a cellist, improviser, and composer who's worked with Laurie Anderson, Thurston Moore, Fred Frith, and Christian Marclay, performs solo. (For more information, visit www.thestonenyc.com.)

VILLAGE VANGUARD
178 Seventh Ave. S., at 11th St. (212-255-4037)—Sept. 2-7 and Sept. 9-14: The atypical drums-saxophone-guitar configuration of the **Paul Motian, Joe Lovano,** and **Bill Frisell** trio hasn't hindered its ascent as one of the premier small groups of jazz. This trio can shift from raucous to poetic during the course of a set. The **Vanguard Jazz Orchestra** holds sway on Mondays.

ART
MUSEUMS AND LIBRARIES

METROPOLITAN MUSEUM
Fifth Ave. at 82nd St. (212-535-7710)—**"J. M. W. Turner."** Through Sept. 21. ♦ **"Landscapes Clear and Radiant: The Art of Wang Hui (1632-1717)."** Opens Sept. 9. ♦ **"Art of the Royal Court: Treasures in Pietre Dure from the Palaces of Europe."** Through Sept. 21. ♦ **"Jeff Koons on the Roof."** Through Oct. 26. ♦ **"Early Buddhist Manuscript Painting: The Palm-Leaf Tradition."** Through March 22. (Open Tuesdays through Sundays, 9:30 to 5:30, and Friday and Saturday evenings until 9.)

MUSEUM OF MODERN ART
11 W. 53rd St. (212-708-9400)—**"Dalí: Painting and Film."** Through Sept. 15. ♦ **"Home Delivery: Fabricating the Modern Dwelling."** Through Oct. 20. ♦ **"Focus: Picasso Sculpture."** This brief survey examines the protean Spaniard's experimental approach to sculpture. In the bronze "Woman's Head (Fernande)" (1909), he tested out Cubism's shifting approaches to mass and form; the plaster "Head of a Woman" (1932) toyed with Surrealism (it was reproduced in the first issue of the influential avant-garde journal *Minotaure).* The show also presents Picasso and Duchamp, often considered to be polar opposites, as kindred spirits, with the inclusion of pieces assembled from found objects—a fruit crate, a plaster-slathered tennis ball, a crowbar, and chicken wire. Through Nov. 3. ♦ **"Kirchner and the Berlin Street."** Through Nov. 10. ♦ **"Wunderkammer: A Century of Curiosities."** Through Nov. 10. ♦ **"Looking at Music."** Through Dec. 31. (Open Wednesdays through Mondays, 10:30 to 5:30, and Friday evenings until 8.)

GUGGENHEIM MUSEUM
Fifth Ave. at 89th St. (212-423-3500)—**"Louise Bourgeois."** Through Sept. 28. ♦ **"Imageless: The Scientific Study and Experimental Treatment of an Ad Reinhardt Black Painting."** Through Sept. 14. (Open Saturdays through Wednesdays, 10 to 5:45, and Fridays, 10 to 7:45.)

WHITNEY MUSEUM OF AMERICAN ART
Madison Ave. at 75th St. (800-944-8639)—**"Buckminster Fuller: Starting with the Universe."** Through Sept. 21. ♦ **"Paul McCarthy: Central Symmetrical Rotation Movement—Three Installations, Two Films."** Through Oct. 12. ♦ **"Polaroids: Mapplethorpe."** Through Sept. 14. (Open Wednesdays, Thursdays, and weekends, 11 to 6, and Fridays, 1 to 9.)

BROOKLYN MUSEUM
200 Eastern Parkway (718-638-5000)—**"Ghada Amer: Love Has No End."** Through Oct. 19. ♦ The floor-to-ceiling steel-and-glass vitrines in the Luce Visible Storage Study Center display the museum's American holdings, from furniture to paintings, with special exhibitions mounted in a nook. The current vest-pocket offering, **"Japonisme in American Graphic Art, 1880-1920,"** spotlights the effect of Japanese art, then newly imported to the West, on turn-of-the-century artists. Charles Caryl Coleman draws Mt. Vesuvius in pastel, rising like Mt. Fuji through blue mist. Joseph Pennell's nocturne etching of the Brooklyn Bridge calls to mind the literal translation of ukiyo-e woodcuts—"pictures of the floating world." With works by Winslow Homer, James Abbott McNeil Whistler, and Mary Cassatt. Through Oct. 12. (Open Wednesdays through Fridays, 10 to 5, and weekends, 11 to 6.)

AMERICAN MUSEUM OF NATURAL HISTORY
Central Park W. at 79th St. (212-769-5100)—**"The Horse."** Through Jan. 4. ♦ **"Lizards and Snakes: Alive!"** Through Jan. 5. (Open daily, 10 to 5:45.)

COOPER-HEWITT NATIONAL DESIGN MUSEUM
Fifth Ave. at 91st St. (212-849-8300)—**"House Proud: Nineteenth-Century Watercolor Interiors from the Thaw Collection."** The equation of domesticity with comfort and ease solidified in the nineteenth century, as seen in these forty-seven exquisite watercolors made by commissioned professionals and amateurs alike. Opulence and exoticism are flaunted in works like "The Japanese Salon at the Villa Hügel, Hietzing, Vienna," while Charlotte Bosanquet's "The Library at Dingestow" suggests a scene straight out of Jane Austen. Through Jan. 25. (Open Mondays through Thursdays, 10 to 5, Fridays, 10 to 9, Saturdays, 10 to 6, and Sundays, noon to 6.)

INTERNATIONAL CENTER OF PHOTOGRAPHY
1133 Sixth Ave., at 43rd St. (212-857-0000)—**"Heavy Light: Recent Photography and Video from Japan."** Through Sept. 7. ♦ **"Bill Wood's**

Advertisement

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Ten Things to Remember

One way for you to take personal action against colorectal cancer is to learn about your risk factors and to understand screening guidelines.

Did You Know?

- Colon cancer is the second leading cause of death from cancer.
- You can reduce your risk of colon cancer by maintaining your ideal body weight, eating less-fatty foods, and increasing dietary fiber.
- Fewer than half of all men and women are up to date on their colon screenings.
- The vast majority of colon cancer is diagnosed in people 50 or older.
- Unlike many other forms of cancer, colorectal cancer often occurs with almost no symptoms.
- Most colorectal cancer can usually be cured if diagnosed at an early stage.
- Regular screening can usually prevent colorectal cancer altogether, if precancerous polyps are detected and removed.
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Business." Through Sept. 7. (Open Tuesdays through Thursdays, and weekends, 10 to 6, and Fridays, 10 to 8.)

MORGAN LIBRARY & MUSEUM
225 Madison Ave., at 36th St. (212-685-0008)—**"Liszt in Paris: Enduring Encounters."** Through Nov. 16. (Open Tuesdays through Thursdays, 10:30 to 5, Fridays, 10:30 to 9, Saturdays, 10 to 6, and Sundays, 11 to 6.)

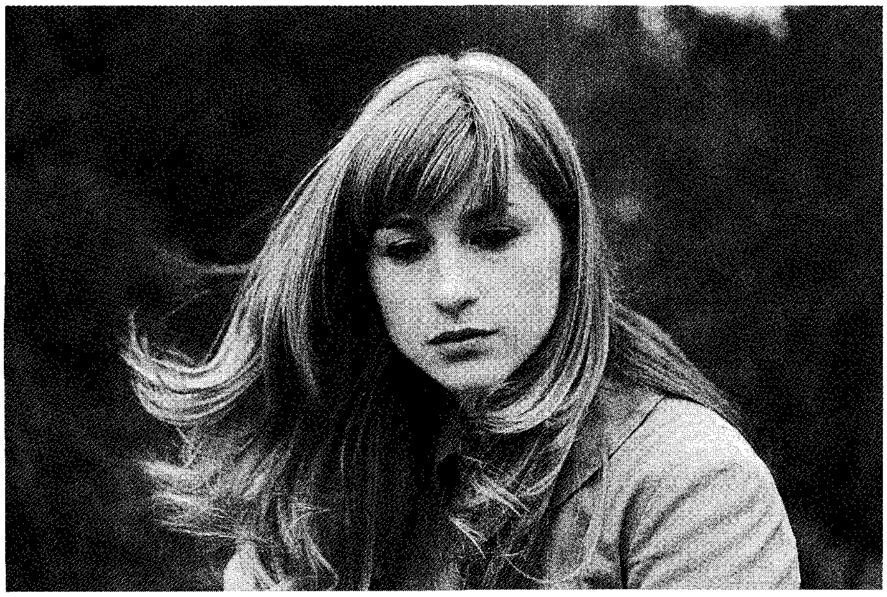
NEW MUSEUM
235 Bowery, at Prince St. (212-219-1222)—**"After Nature."** Through Sept. 21. ♦ **"Altoids Award: Ei Arakawa, Lauren Kelley, Michael Patterson-Carver, and Michael Stickrod."** Through Oct. 12. (Open Wednesdays and weekends, noon to 6, and Thursdays and Fridays, noon to 10.)

P.S. 1 CONTEMPORARY ART CENTER
22-25 Jackson Ave., at 46th Ave., Long Island City (718-784-2084)—**"Arctic Hysteria: New Art from Finland."** Through Sept. 15. ♦ **"James Turrell's Meeting."** The artist's "skyspace" installation will be open at sunset on Saturdays. Through Sept. 6. (Open Thursdays through Mondays, noon to 6.)

STUDIO MUSEUM IN HARLEM
144 W. 125th St. (212-864-4500)—**"Kehinde Wiley—The World Stage: Africa, Lagos ~ Dakar."** Through Oct. 26. (Open Wednesdays through Fridays, and Sundays, noon to 6, and Saturdays, 10 to 6.)

GALLERIES—UPTOWN

JANET MALCOLM
Malcolm, who has written incisively about photography for this magazine, gets behind the camera with these chic, understated color images of single leaves. Her subject is the burdock tree, whose handsome, heart-shaped leaves can be as big as a human face and just as ravaged by time. Shot against stark white backgrounds, in the style of classic botanical prints, each leaf has the presence and individuality of a portrait—tattered, mottled, torn, yet always somehow grand. Malcolm cites Richard Avedon as a model, but an even more obvious touchstone is Irving Penn, whose still-lifes of cigarette butts and fading flowers set the standard for this sort of elegant ruin. Opens Sept. 9. (Bookstein, 37 W. 57th St. 212-750-0949.)



Aya Cash, who stars in Nicky Silver's "Three Changes," at Playwrights Horizons.

ALEXANDRA CATIERE

JUDITH JOY ROSS
The subjects of Ross's portraits were photographed outdoors during demonstrations against the war in Iraq. Isolated from the other protestors and only rarely identified by a button or a placard, they are ordinary people, distinguished mostly by their air of gravity and concern. They might be out shopping, but something is weighing on them; Ross passes that weight along as if it were a gift—a burden that it's a privilege to share. Her small black-and-white prints, warm-toned and unusually luminous, have an impact that's way out of proportion to their size. Here, the strength of her commitment is matched by that of her subjects, and the pictures reflect that intensity. Opens Sept. 4. (Pace/MacGill, 32 E. 57th St. 212-759-7999.)

Short List

JOHN ASHBERY / TREVOR WINKFIELD: De Nagy, 724 Fifth Ave., at 57th St. 212-262-5050. Opens Sept. 4. **CHARLES BURNS:** Baumgold, 74 E. 79th St. 212-861-7338. Opens Sept. 5. **GIUSEPPE PENONE:** Marian Goodman, 24 W. 57th St. 212-977-7160. Opens Sept. 9. **THEODORE ROSZAK / CHARLES SELIGER:** Rosenfeld, 24 W. 57th St. 212-247-0082. Opens Sept. 6.

GALLERIES—CHELSEA

SYDNEY LICHT
At first glance, it may look like Licht has given the classical genre of still-life painting a "Sex and the City" update, replacing arrangements of apples and oranges with those of shopping bags from Bendel's and Bergdorf's. But while the ostensible subject of these deft little oils is, indeed, the trappings of shopping, it's clear that Licht's real interest lies in the prima materia of paint. Giorgio Morandi, the master alchemist of the still-life, is an obvious touchstone, even when the palette shifts from lunar white to bright red. Opens Sept. 4. (Markel, 529 W. 20th St. 212-366-5368.)

ALESSANDRA SANGUINETTI
Sanguinetti, a New York photographer who spends a lot of time in Buenos Aires, returns to the two inseparable Argentinean cousins who were the subjects of her 2004 show and finds the girls growing up and growing apart. The games and fantasies they once shared on their family farm are behind them, and everyday life no longer looms so large. Instead, the girls seem to have drifted into worlds of their own—one into young motherhood, the other into spinsterhood. When they come together for Sanguinetti's photographs, the work remains affecting, but it has a new tension—the melancholy feel of friendship in transition. Opens Sept. 4. (Milo, 525 W. 25th St. 212-414-0370.)

PHOEBE WASHBURN
In this zany installation, a washing machine cleans used T-shirts, which were purchased by the pound. The runoff water is then filtered and either colored and bottled or used to irrigate plants in the gallery. The shirts (now stamped with a logo), the dyed water, and assorted refreshments are sold in a café-shanty-sculpture, constructed from two-by-fours. While Washburn's cottage-industry approach recalls Gelitin's recent human-powered copier and the churning washer evokes Wim Delvoye's mechanical digestive system, her installation tackles serious issues—production, fallacious "green" marketing, recycling—with a rare balance of whimsy and social engagement. Through Oct. 4. (Feuer, 530 W. 24th St. 212-989-7700.)

"TOTALLY RAD: NEW YORK IN THE 80S"
The title borrows a phrase from California surf lingo, but never mind the coastal confusion—"Totally Rad" offers a holistic view of New York in the go-go eighties. There are large-scale works by painters who made it big in that decade, including Kenny Scharf, Jean-Michel Basquiat, David Salle, and Julian Schnabel. The Pictures Generation (Cindy Sherman, Robert Longo) and appropriation crowd (Jeff Koons, Haim Steinbach) also make the scene. In the course of just seventeen works—from the scathing politics of Jenny Holzer's L.E.D. text to the fashionista frivolity of Andy Warhol's painting of Beatle boots—the show conveys the complexity of the era. Through Sept. 6. (Kasmin, 293 Tenth Ave., at 27th St. 212-563-4474.)

Short List

ROBERT BORDO: Alexander and Bonin, 132 Tenth Ave., at 18th St. 212-367-7474. Opens Sept. 6. **ROE ETHERIDGE:** Kreps, 525 W. 22nd St. 212-741-8849. Opens Sept. 4. **JANE HAMMOND:** Galerie Lelong, 528 W. 26th St. 212-315-0470. Opens Sept. 4. **JOSEF KOUDELKA:** Aperture, 547 W. 27th St. 212-505-5555. Opens Sept. 4. **ALIX PEARLSTEIN:** The Kitchen, 512 W. 19th St. 212-255-5793. Opens Sept. 5. **MARTHA ROSLER:** Mitchell-Innes & Nash, 534 W. 26th St. 212-744-7400. Opens Sept. 6. **JOEL STERNFELD:** Luhring Augustine, 531 W. 24th St. 212-206-9100. Opens Sept. 6. **TAM VAN TRAN:** Cohan and Leslie, 138 Tenth Ave., at 18th St. 212-206-8710. Opens Sept. 5. **COSIMA VON BONIN:** Petzel, 535 W. 22nd St. 212-680-9467. Opens Sept. 4.

DANCE

"EVENING STARS"
The popular, free, and alfresco series in Battery Park kicks off the fall dance calendar. On Friday, the always lovely Lar Lubovitch Dance Company starts celebrating its fortieth anniversary—a party that will continue at Dance Theatre Workshop and City Center later in the season—with its signature "Concerto Six Twenty-Two." On Saturday, the gorgeous showboat Rasta Thomas calls in his multi-genre flock of peacocks Bad Boys of Dance. And, as if that weren't enough beefcake, the seven hunky Spanish brothers known as Los Vivancos bring their boy-band mix of flamenco and acrobatics to the U.S. for the first time on Sunday. (Sept. 5-7 at 7:30. Visit www.rivertorivernyc.com for further details.)

NEW CHAMBER BALLET
Miro Magloire's company is something of a dance/new-music collaborative, which makes for a bracing intellectual challenge. Its two topnotch musicians—Melody Fader, on piano, and Erik Carlson, on violin—get to sink their teeth into difficult contemporary pieces, and Magloire has the good sense to bring in varied choreographic voices. At City Center's Studio 4, there will be a new piece by the imagistic young guest choreographer Constantine Baecher—inspired by Louise Bourgeois's spider sculptures, and set to

music by John Cage—and another by the company dancer Lauren Toole, her first, a quartet with music by Paul Hindemith. Magloire will offer two ballets to difficult scores by Stockhausen: a new piece made for his newest dancer, Maddie Deavenport, and his trio for two dancers and a piano, "Klavierstuck." (130 W. 56th St. 212-868-4444. Sept. 5-6 at 8.)

DANSCORES BY OFELIA LORET DE MOLA
The Lower Manhattan Cultural Council's "Sitelines" series comes to a close with "Available Space," in which the Mexican-born choreographer unleashes her anti-establishment opinions and conventional modern-dance vocabulary upon City Hall Park. Mexican punk musicians add to the street-theatre cacophony. (Enter at Park Row and Broadway. 212-219-9401. Sept. 8-9 at 12:30. Through Sept. 15.)

"WORKS & PROCESS"
Next week the Miller Theatre will present an immensely ambitious project: the first U.S. staging of Iannis Xenakis's only opera, "Oresteia" (the 1992 version). This week, in a preview at the intimate theatre tucked beneath the Guggenheim, "Works & Process" will kick off its enlightening behind-the-scenes discussion series with a conversation between the director of this endeavor (Luca Veggetti), Xenakis's widow (Françoise Xenakis), Xenakis's former collaborator Sharon Kanach, and the director of the Miller Theatre, George Steel, who is stepping down this month. As always, excerpts will be performed, in this case by bass Wilbur Pauley and four of Veggetti's dancers, including the impressive Frances Chiaverini. (Fifth Ave. and 89th St. 212-423-3587. Sept. 8 at 7:30.)

CLASSICAL MUSIC
CONCERTS IN TOWN

VERTICAL PLAYER REPERTORY: "THE TALES OF HOFFMANN"
Offenbach's final opera, about the misadventures of a young, idealistic artist and social outcast, is mounted by a passel of young, idealistic artists in an appropriately scruffy setting—the Brooklyn waterfront. Judith Barnes's intrepid company returns to the Red Hook Marine Terminal (where it staged Puccini's "Il Tabarro" last year) for a production directed by Seth Baumrin and Adrienne D. Williams (and featuring Barnes as the courtesan Giulietta). (Hamilton Ave. at Van Brunt St. 212-868-4444. Sept. 5 and Sept. 7 at 8. Through Sept. 21.)

BARGEMUSIC
The end-of-summer concert schedule may slow to a trickle, but the floating chamber-music series perseveres. Sept. 5 at 8: Ned Rorem, the distinguished composer and bellelettrist, is the focus of the barge's next "Here and Now" concert, offered in celebration of the composer's upcoming eighty-fifth birthday. Most of the music (performed by the flutist Shawn Wyckoff and the pianist Olga Vinokur, among others) comes from the nineteen-eighties (including "Bright Music" and the Dances for Cello and Piano), while the String Quartet No. 2, a true rarity, dates from 1952; all of it is melodically inspired and impeccably refined. ◆ Sept. 6 at 8 and Sept. 7 at 4: Tradition returns with the Shanghai String Quartet, a fiery and superbly disciplined young ensemble, which joins the violist Mark Peskanov and the former cellist of the Guarneri String Quartet, David Soyer, in a program featuring the first of Beethoven's "Razumovsky" quartets (in F Major) and Brahms's String Sextet No. 2 in G Major. (Fulton Ferry Landing, Brooklyn. 718-624-2083.)

ONE WORLD SYMPHONY
Sung Jin Hong and his young freelance orchestra open their season with "Italian Summer," an ambitious program offering Respighi's "Pines of Rome," Vivaldi's "Summer" Concerto from "The Four Seasons," and a complete concert performance of Mascagni's opera "Cavalleria Rusticana." (St. Ann and the Holy Trinity Church, 157 Montague St., Brooklyn. Sept. 5 at 8. ◆ Ansche Chesed Synagogue, 251 W. 100th St. Sept. 7 at 7:30.) (Tickets at the door.)

(LE) POISSON ROUGE: "SOLDIER SONGS"
The new downtown club and performance space ("Serving Art & Alcohol," according to its motto) offers two performances of the theatrical solo cantata (which was featured at City Opera's "VOX" festival last spring) by the talented David T. Little, who is ambitious as both a young composer and a political activist. The piece, which mixes classical and rock music together with video and animation, features David Adam Moore in its featured role; Todd Reynolds conducts members of the ensemble Newspeak in the work's first fully staged production. (158 Bleecker St. 800-838-3006. Sept. 6-7 at 7. Doors open one hour before the performance.)

"A SINGULAR VOICE: JOAN TOWER"
On the occasion of her seventieth birthday, the prominent American composer will be hailed by a group of her sterling performer friends—including the violist Paul Neubauer, the pianists Blair McMillen and James Tocco, Eighth Blackbird, and the Kalichstein-Laredo-Robinson Trio, who will perform such evocatively titled works as "Copperware," "Big Sky," "Simply Purple," and the elegaic piano trio "For Daniel." (Merkin Concert Hall, 129 W. 67th St. 212-501-3330. Sept. 6 at 8:30.)

JUPITER SYMPHONY CHAMBER PLAYERS
Items seemingly "from the vault" are the mainstays of this ensemble, formed in honor of the brilliant (and very eccentric) late conductor Jens Nygaard. Its latest program features Beethoven's Piano Trio in B-Flat Major, Op. 11 (with flute instead of violin), his pupil Czerny's obscure "Grande Serenade Concertante," and a reconstruction (by Sebastian H. Brown) of the discarded String Quintet in F Minor by Brahms, the music that was eventually transformed into the great Piano Quintet, Op. 34. (Good Shepherd Presbyterian Church, 152 W. 66th St. 212-799-1259. Sept. 8 at 2 and 7:30.)

SOHEIL NASSERI
Over the last decade this young pianist (a protégé of such masters as Jerome Lowenthal and Karl Ulrich Schnabel) has gone from social gadfly to eminent survivor, operating from a steady position on the edge of the New York scene. At Merkin Concert Hall he begins the season with a concert typically combining masterworks (Beethoven's Seven Bagatelles, Op. 33, Schumann's "Waldszenen" and "Faschingsschwank aus Wien") with novelties (premières of two works by the young Palestinian composer Samir Odeh-Tamimi). (129 W. 67th St. 212-501-3330. Sept. 9 at 8.)

OUT OF TOWN

MUSIC MOUNTAIN
Northern Connecticut's string-quartet shrine ends the summer with panache. Sept. 6 at 6:30: The Alexander Fiterstein Trio—named for the superb young clarinettist—makes its series début with what will be a lively evening of klezmer music. ◆ Sept. 7 at 3: The St. Petersburg String Quartet, a longtime favorite at the mountain, wraps things up by performing not only Shostakovich's impassioned String Quartet No. 8 but also Mozart's "Kegelstatt" Trio and music by Piazzolla and Brahms (the Piano Quintet, with Alexander Mekinulov). (Falls Village, Conn. 860-824-7126.)

SOUTH MOUNTAIN CONCERTS
Musically minded vacationers lingering on in the Berkshires may want to check out this storied little festival, which brings in a small group of élite ensembles to bridge the gap between summer and fall. First to go on is the redoubtable Kalichstein-Laredo-Robinson Trio, which will offer a hefty program of piano trios by Rachmaninoff, Arensky (No. 1 in D Minor), and Tchaikovsky. (Pittsfield, Mass. 413-442-2106. Sept. 7 at 3.)

CRITIC'S NOTEBOOK
POP LIFE

It is an indication of how pop has changed that the English rocker Pop Levi—his real name, minus the pedestrian Jonathan—had to move to Los Angeles to find his voice, which is still fairly English. Levi is not a difficult artist, on the face of it. His wheelhouse is the glammed-up pop-rock of Marc Bolan, where any rhythm can find shelter under a crunchy guitar, and gender is just a question for insecure dudes to deal with while you climb into an enormous red kimono and choose your eyeliner. His 2007 solo album, "The Return to Form Black Magick Party," found him already formed; his new record, "Never Never Love," is even more satisfying. Slightly less indebted to the sound of T. Rex and only occasionally consorting with computers, the songs sound like they could have been released in any of the past four decades. But it's good that they have been released in this one: aside from country music and Pink, there aren't that many places to find well-written guitar pop that foregrounds hooks without renouncing a lightness of touch. Levi is an iPod ad away from well-deserved ubiquity.

—Sasha Frere-Jones

MAXIMILIAN BODE

MOVIES OPENING

AUGUST EVENING
A drama, directed by Chris Eska, about several generations of Latino migrant workers in Texas. Opening Sept. 5. (Village East Cinemas.)

BANGKOK DANGEROUS
Reviewed this week in The Current Cinema. Opening Sept. 5. (In wide release.)

EVERYBODY WANTS TO BE ITALIAN
Jason Todd Ipson directed this romantic comedy, about a fishmonger (Jay Jablonski) who meets a veterinarian (Cerina Vincent) at a singles night for Italian-Americans. Opening Sept. 5. (In limited release.)

MISTER FOE
Reviewed this week in The Current Cinema. Opening Sept. 5. (Angelika Film Center.)

PING PONG PLAYA
A comedy, directed by Jessica Yu, about a young Chinese-American table-tennis teacher (Jimmy Tsai) who tries to compete at the national level. Opening Sept. 5. (42nd Street E-Walk and Village Theatre VII.)

THE POOL
A drama, set in Goa, India, about a poor teen-ager who dreams of being able to dive into a wealthy neighbor's swimming pool. Directed by Chris Smith. Opening Sept. 3. (Film Forum.)

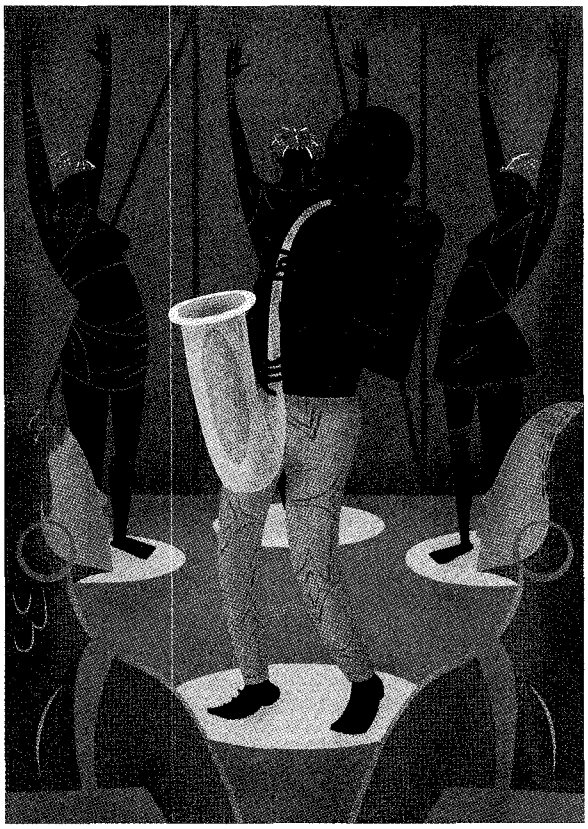
SAVE ME
In this drama, directed by Robert Cary, a young, drug-addicted gay man (Chad Allen) is sent to a religious institution where an attempt is made to change his sexual orientation. Opening Sept. 5. (Chelsea Cinemas.)

A SECRET
Reviewed below in Now Playing. Opening Sept. 5. (IFC Center and Paris.)

NOW PLAYING

THE DARK KNIGHT
The last Batman movie was grim and methodical; this one, also directed by Christopher Nolan, is grim and incoherent, with a thudding soundtrack, fights shot from too close a distance to see anything, multiple events clanging together like discordant bells, and freaky sadism and menace. Christian Bale is the placid Bruce Wayne, a swank gent in Armani suits. As Batman, he has greater urgency, but he delivers his lines in a hoarse voice with an unvarying inflection. He's no match for the great Heath Ledger as his nemesis, the Joker. Ledger, in a fright wig and gobs of white makeup, shambles and slides into a room, bending his knees and twisting his neck and suddenly surging right into someone's face like a deep-sea creature coming up for air. He's thoroughly terrifying (do not, despite the PG-13 rating, bring little children), and, as you're watching him, you can't help wondering how badly he messed himself up in order to play the role this way. "The Dark Knight" has been made in a time of terror, but it's not fighting terror; it's embracing and unleashing it—while making sure, with proper calculation, to set up the next installment of the corporate franchise. With Gary Oldman, Aaron Eckhart, and Maggie Gyllenhaal.—*David Denby* (Reviewed in our issue of 7/21/08.) (In wide release.)

ELEGY
Of all the good actors who have adorned the cycle of middle-aged-professor films in the past decade, Ben Kingsley, in this adaptation of Philip Roth's 2001 novel, "The Dying Animal," is the most formidable and convincing. Kingsley's David Kepesh is a literature teacher at Columbia and a regular virtuoso performer on television and NPR. At sixty-four, Kingsley has the grizzled barrel chest of an aging sexual warrior, a strong nose, and a shaved head. He's shrewd enough to make David not a monster but a plausibly selfish man. Nicholas Meyer's script captures some of the Rothian tone—the impatience, the sharpness, the full-bore egotism that modulates into rueful self-recognition. At the end of the semester, the professor seduces a graduate student, Consuelo (Penélope Cruz), a woman of Cuban descent, slightly formal in her manner. She wants a connection to culture; David wants a final mad immersion in lust, which arrives, not to his surprise, with its attendant idiocies of jealousy and possessiveness. Mortality and misfortune abruptly enter his life as well. With Patricia Clarkson, Dennis Hopper, and Peter Sarsgaard. Directed by Isabel Coixet.—*D.D.* (8/11 & 18/08) (In wide release.)



"Fela!," choreographed and directed by Bill T. Jones, at 37 Arts.

PUNY

EMERGENCY KISSES
Philippe Garrel's intensely romantic, self-revealing drama, from 1989, seems made to be watched alone late at night. It begins with a harsh flourish, as a movie director, Mathieu (Garrel himself) is besieged by his wife, Jeanne (Brigitte Sy, Garrel's then-wife), an actress who wants to play the lead role in his upcoming film—which is based on her, but in which he has cast another actress (Anémone). When the confusion of art and life undermines his marriage, the despairing Mathieu is advised by his father (Maurice Garrel, the director's father) to rely on the couple's child, Louis (Louis Garrel, son of Garrel and Sy), as an aid to reconciliation. In this painfully personal and unsparing film, Garrel matches his self-excoriating sincerity with artistic self-control, elegant style, and sure taste. His is an aesthete's rawness, a cultivated anguish. Marc Cholodenko's lusciously aphoristic dialogue and Jacques Loiseleux's high-contrast images (which make even daytime landscapes feel nocturnal) add to the exquisite—and quintessentially French—beauty of Garrel's art, the triple sensation of experiencing wild emotion, beholding it, and beholding oneself in the act of doing so. In French.—*Richard Brody* (MOMA; Sept. 6 and Sept. 8.)

A GIRL CUT IN TWO
The girl of the title of Claude Chabrol's impeccably calm and composed new movie is a TV weather presenter called Gabrielle Deneige (Ludivine Sagnier). Though not always as pure as her snowy name, she innocently drifts into the arms of two besmirching men: Charles Saint-Denis (François Berléand), a respected author decades her senior, and Paul Gaudens (Benoît Magimel), a chemicals-fortune heir who is an unsavory compound of dandy, cad, and wacko. Gabrielle is no fortune hunter, so what does she see in this pair? In a way, that is not Chabrol's business. The heart has its reasons, the reasons drive us mad, and his task is to forge a style from the result. His trademarks are all there: the quick, elliptical scenes, the unfussy fades to black, and the pulse of interest that can bring a camera hastening smoothly to inspect the characters, up close and personal, as their feelings ignite. Despite the seventy-eight-year-old director's Charles-like fondness for young flesh, the older people seem to attract him more; age has made them not wiser but more civilized and therefore, from his point of view, more corrupt. He remains as committed as ever to his twin duties of scourge and hedonist, yet one can't help wishing that he would, just once, cast off his own good narrative manners and arrange his passions into shameless, surreal anagrams of wit and lust.—*Anthony Lane* (8/25/08) (IFC Center and Lincoln Plaza Cinemas.)

HAMLET 2
Or, "Everybody Lives." This messy comedy, directed by Andrew Fleming, is about a Tucson drama teacher (Steve Coogan) who hopes to avoid the school-budget axe by developing a stage show for his students to perform in. His production reverses the ending of "Hamlet" and adds Jesus Christ and Hillary Clinton to the mix; it also alludes to his unhappy home life and his students' teen-age problems. The film veers so wildly between comedy (in which Coogan is often inspired) and kitchen-sink drama (everyone needs to learn to love themselves) that it fails to maintain a consistent tone. And an array of good supporting actors, including Catherine Keener, Elisabeth Shue, and Amy Poehler, are left standing in the wings with little to do. The material seems recycled from bits of "Happy, Texas," "Little Miss Sunshine," and a host of other Sundance favorites, and although that may sound gleefully anarchic, the result is mostly baffling.—*Bruce Diones* (In wide release.)

THE HOUSE BUNNY
This amiable botch squanders some terrific comic talent, starting with its star, Anna Faris, a Judy Holliday for our times. As a castoff *Playboy* bunny who lands a job as house mother to a nerdy sorority, where she gives the socially challenged sisters lessons in style—and from whom she takes lessons in substance—Faris infuses the stereotype with heart and ditzy charm. As the Greek house's awkward leader, Emma Stone ("Superbad") is plausible and touching; Hugh Hefner appears as himself, bravely biting the hand that feeds him; and the script, by Karen McCullah Lutz and Kirsten Smith (who co-wrote "Legally Blonde"), has some bright moments; but the director, Fred Wolf, never finds the tone, pace, or wit it calls for. Such droll gags as a clever update on Marilyn Monroe's windblown-dress photo op are dully executed. Moreover, a young woman's unwanted pregnancy brought to term makes this wan entertainment yet another youth-oriented sop to the anti-abortion doctrinaires.—*R.B.* (In wide release.)

I SERVED THE KING OF ENGLAND
A Czech national epic served up with champagne and truffles. Jiří Menzel's graceful and leisurely movie, adapted from a 1974 novel by the masterly Bohumil Hrabal, covers an enormous time span, starting out in the thirties, passing through the Nazi occupation, and then moving to the Communist period after the war. It covers an enormous range of experience, too, yet the style is consistently playful, even frivolous, and slyly erotic—at times, we might be watching a naked operetta. The movie dramatizes the incongruities of Czech experience by charting the unlikely progress of Jan Dítě (the Bulgarian

actor Ivan Barnev), a charming Everyman—a waiter by trade, ever optimistic, completely unmarked by knowledge or experience. Barnev spins with his trays among the customers as if pirouetting on ice skates. He and Menzel play up the Chaplin associations; the diminutive actor has Chaplin's darting physical agility as well as his lecherous instincts beneath the honeyed manners. The small country, like the small man, gets pushed around by bullies but survives through instinct and guile. It's as if Menzel were celebrating not only Czech identity after the murderous twentieth century but his own cunning and perseverance as an artist. With Oldrich Kaiser playing Ditě as a middle-aged man.—*D.D.* (9/1//08) (Lincoln Plaza Cinemas and Quad Cinema.)

MAN ON WIRE

In 1974, Philippe Petit, the poet of the high wire, sneaked his merry men into one of the towers of the World Trade Center, strung a cable across to its sister building, and performed an above-the-clouds ballet that has never been equalled. This documentary, written and directed by James Marsh, takes the archival footage of that event and, along with new interviews from the participants as well as staged reconstructions, weaves an exciting tale that plays like a heist film. The story of how and why Petit accomplished this astonishing feat is thrilling, and the charismatic Frenchman was made for the camera. He's graceful, articulate, and endearing, much like the film itself.—*B.D.* (In limited release.)

PINEAPPLE EXPRESS

It's a two-guys-on-the-run action comedy, based on an old idea by Judd Apatow, who also co-produced. Seth Rogen, a process server in a suit, witnesses a drug rubout; James Franco, Seth's pot dealer, knows the murderer, who goes in pursuit of the two of them with his pals. Both men are stoned all the time, and have to keep reminding themselves, in long, muzzy conversations that are an important part of the picture, that they are actually in serious trouble. The movie, directed by David Gordon Green, has an odd, interesting stop-and-go rhythm. The violence is perpetrated with the means at hand—bongs, lamps, coffeepots—and people often apologize for the damage they are doing. The big shoot-out and explosion at the end, however, are depressingly conventional. With Danny R. McBride as an exceptionally slippery drug distributor who takes a lot of punishment. Written by Rogen and Evan Goldberg.—*D.D.* (In wide release.)

A SECRET

Three generations of a French Jewish family as they haunt the memory and emotions of a young man (Mathieu Amalric). Claude Miller's movie, based on "Memory," a novel by Philippe Grimbert, begins in sunshine as the hero, a young boy in the nineteen-fifties, contemplates his goddess mother (Cécile De France) standing on a diving board. What he doesn't know is that all sorts of erotic intrigues swirled around her during the German Occupation and meshed disastrously with the French collaboration. Miller gives us fascinating glimpses of the family's life in both prosperous and straitened times—the movie opens up French Jewish life in a way never seen before in this country. With Patrick Bruel, Ludivine Sagnier, and Julie Depardieu.—*D.D.* (IFC Center and Paris.)

SONS OF THE DESERT

Burly Oliver Hardy may pretend he's the cock of the walk, but he's just as henpecked as Stan Laurel in this inspired runaway-husbands farce from 1933. A helpful vet posing as a doc prescribes a trip to Honolulu as a cover for the pair to travel from L.A. to Chicago for the annual convention of their fraternal organization. Laurel in this movie is the slapstick laureate of passive aggression. His somnolent squiggle of a walk and his dazed-newborn expressions convey his instinct for getting what he wants while yielding to every personality louder or more potent than he is, such as his wife—who, in this beautifully high-pitched setup, is a rifle-toting duck hunter. Domestic wheedling has never been funnier or more pathetic than when enacted by Hardy, who displays his mastery not just of the slow burn but of the flare-up and the blaze, too. If William A. Seiter's direction is static, the effect is like seeing a series of tableaux tickled to pieces.—*Michael Sragow* (Anthology Film Archives; Sept. 5.)

STREET SMART

The great actor Morgan Freeman gives the role of a Times Square pimp, Fast Black, a scary sordid magnetism that gives this 1987 picture some bite. Magically, he sustains Fast Black's authenticity; it's like sustaining King Lear inside "Gidget Goes Hawaiian." The ostensible star is Christopher Reeve; he appears as a Harvard-educated freelance writer who fabricates a story about "twenty-four hours in the life of a pimp," and then becomes enmeshed in Fast Black's efforts to get clear of a murder charge. The director, Jerry Schatzberg, can make viewers feel the beauty and excitement of everyday grit, and he makes the script (by David Freeman) look and play better than it deserves to, but he can't give it conviction, rootedness—he can't conceal the author's thin, brassy attitude. (The screenwriter did, in fact, fabricate "The Lifestyle of a Pimp," in *New York*, May 5, 1969; there were no dire results.) Most of the performers do their damnedest. Kathy Baker brings a sexy intelligence to the role of the prostitute Punchy, and André Gregory is terrific as Reeve's smug, dryly self-amused editor. (He's his own yes-man.)—*Pauline Kael* (Anthology Film Archives; Sept. 6 and Sept. 8.)

TABLES FOR TWO
THE NEW FRENCH

NATALIE MATUTSCHOVSKY

522 Hudson St. (212-807-7357)—The New French is really the new New French, since its owners have reimagined a defunct Minneapolis joint of the same name. The New French also replaces the old French of Le Gamin, the spot's previous tenant. In any case, the New French isn't French. The new French, as manifested by the New French, is new American. All of this was explained the other night, more or less, by a waiter whose T-shirt depicted the California state flag. He took care to add that, while forty remains the new thirty, the new black is harder than ever to pin down.

After you've nailed the name, you can tackle the New French's pleasingly straightforward menu, which, when coupled with the dining room's agreeably understated atmosphere, imbues a patron with a kind of ready-made I-wanna-be-a-regular yen. (It helps, these days, that everyone lusts after the West Village.) The space, small, with a couple dozen tables and a quarter as many staff, can at times be a tad cozy, but its centerpiece, an orange-white-and-gold mural by the illustrator Maira Kalman, of trees and animals and men in porkpie hats, is elegant in its modesty. The bench out front seems to sum the place up. You may sit there, whether or not your evening plans include dinner, and not get the stink eye; the New French just wants to be your friend.

The trick, as the chef Livio Velardo seems to see it, is to lay off the tricks. "This place is honest," a diner pronounced recently, after he and his tablemates happily put away the chicken-liver crostini and the day's pizza—with grilled onions, goat cheese, and roasted red peppers—and were halfway through a bottle of Pinot Bianco, because, well, the Pinot Blanc just wasn't supposed to be on the menu. The table advanced to well-crafted entrées of roast chicken with bok choy and oyster mushrooms and roast lamb with sautéed tomatoes and runner beans. Velardo's pho was deemed too gingery, but his pulled pork, braised with chili and beer, offered plenty of succor with its spice. The desserts were functional though forgettable: "The tart is tart," the diner said, of an underwhelming lemon curd. Maybe a bit of imperfection is the new perfection. (Open daily for lunch and dinner. Entrées $12-$25.)

—*Mike Peed*

TRAITOR

Part thriller, part moral drama, and only so-so either way. Don Cheadle is Samir Horn, a Muslim raised in Chicago who served in the U.S. special services but then "went over" to Islamic terrorists who are planning attacks on America. At least, that's what Clayton (Guy Pearce), a persistent and highly airborne counter-terrorism specialist in the F.B.I., thinks. Despite its fresh settings (it was shot in Morocco and Marseilles, as well as in Chicago) and its view of how terrorists recruit and train people and talk to one another, the movie has the familiar form of something like "Sleeper Cell," a Showtime series from 2005-06 about an African-American Muslim who penetrates a terrorist group in Los Angeles, or of an undercover-cop picture like "Donnie Brasco," in which the good-guy hero enters the Mafia and has to decide whether to take part in crimes in order to sustain his credibility among the hoods. The acting is generally solid, though the terrorist leaders, when you meet them, are suave in the manner of Hollywood Nazis from 1942, who ran art galleries, wore silk dressing gowns, and spoke in the most cultivated tones. With Saïd Taghmaoui, as Omar, an ardent Moroccan terrorist.—*D.D.* (9/1/08) (In wide release.)

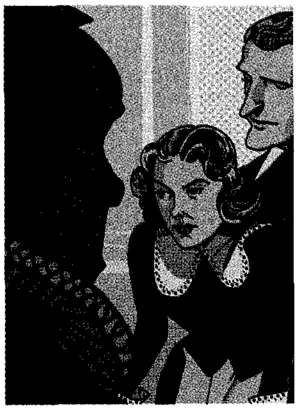
TROPIC THUNDER

This comedy begins with a film-within-a-film, a Vietnam War movie that's being filmed on location, a savage spectacular with a bulging budget and a trio of major stars: depleted tough guy Tugg Speedman (Ben Stiller), five-time Academy Award winner Kirk Lazarus (Robert Downey, Jr.), and drug-hazed comic lardass Jeff Portnoy (Jack Black). When their hapless British director (Steve Coogan) is blown up by a land mine, the stars are left to fend for themselves in the jungle, whereupon they are beset by real enemies—a horde of drug dealers—and forced to fight back. Stiller not only stars in the film but also directed it and wrote the script, with Etan Cohen and Justin Theroux. These guys seem to be filing a stream of reports from the borders of taste; their deepest dread is to stay in the comfort zone. Their most controversial move is to have Downey perform entirely in blackface, but they carefully frame the insult in cooling ironies. As a jab at the movie business, "Tropic Thunder" is flailing and unfocussed, and the caterwauling of the characters and the nastiness (at once silly and bloody) of the special effects leaves you feeling more embattled than entertained. It's every man for himself, in every sequence, as though Stiller needed to prove that movie stars—these few, these unhappy few, this band of bastards—were the opposite of noble warriors.—*A.L.* (8/25/08) (In wide release.)

TROUBLE THE WATER

This depressingly conventional but ultimately fascinating documentary, directed by Tia Lessin

CRITIC'S NOTEBOOK
DANISH MODERN



The subject is religion and the style is chaste, but Carl Theodor Dreyer's "Day of Wrath," from 1943—a superb restoration of which is at IFC Center through Sept. 4—is actually a sacrilegious paean to pleasure. The story, set in 1623, concerns Anne (Lisbeth Movin), the beautiful young wife of a grim, aging minister; she has an affair with Martin, the minister's handsome son (Preben Lerdorff Rye). The framework, though, is witch-hunting, starting with the interrogation and torture of an elderly woman (Anna Svierkier, in a brave and heartrending performance), who reveals that Anne's own mother had faced such charges. (In the context of German-occupied Denmark, imagine the word "Jew" for "witch.") Furious passions burst through the film's quiet sobriety: a shot in which Anne, gliding wordlessly, ensnares Martin in her gaze has the force of the Dance of the Seven Veils. Dreyer's impious, anarchic drama, a cry of rage at abusive authority—whether political, familial, religious, or moral—celebrates erotic love as the natural order of things.

—*Richard Brody*

and Carl Deal, views Hurricane Katrina and its aftermath from the perspective of a young New Orleans couple, Kimberly Rivers Roberts and Scott Roberts, who refused to evacuate their Ninth Ward home and videotaped the storm and the resulting flood. Following them through the stages of their ordeal, the filmmakers expose an appalling range of anecdotal evidence to demonstrate the federal government's feeble response to the crisis and its high-handed indifference toward the city's poorest residents. Yet, despite their legitimate outrage, the film also evokes unintended ironies. The Robertses, as seen in the film, are young people of extraordinary strength of character (Kimberly is an aspiring hip-hop artist, Scott a former drug dealer seeking to change his ways); they and their neighbor Larry Simms are seen rising to the challenge of danger with remarkable courage and generosity, and the film's ending suggests that they've managed to improve their lives after the catastrophe in ways that were not foreseeable beforehand. But the loss of lives, livelihoods, and community ties, as well as the yet unrelieved devastation, tempers their fortunes with grief and mourning.—*R.B.* (IFC Center and ImageNation at the Faison Firehouse Theatre.)

VICKY CRISTINA BARCELONA

Woody Allen's new movie has an easy, flowing vitality to it, a sun-drenched splendor that never falters. Two American girls go off to Barcelona for the summer—Vicky (Rebecca Hall), who is intelligent, skeptical, cautious, and thoroughly engaged to a corporate lawyer in New York, and Cristina (Scarlett Johansson), who is more adventurous than her friend but unformed and easily dissatisfied, a seeker without a lodestar. In the magnificent city, they meet Juan Antonio (Javier Bardem), a painter who is incapable of spending a night alone. Both women get involved with him, and the movie becomes a complicated triangle that forms, breaks apart, and re-forms, as well as a lengthy exploration of the eternal struggle between security and passion, dependency and anarchic freedom. Juan Antonio's former wife, Maria Elena (Penélope Cruz), who is highly intelligent and artistically talented but so tempestuous that she creates havoc wherever she goes, crashes into the movie and busts everything apart. The American girls yearn for something more than bourgeois stability, but Allen means for us to understand that a life of passion alone can lead to craziness and violence. Shot in sumptuous gold and ochre colors by Javier Aguirresarobe.—*D.D.* (8/11 & 18/08) (In wide release.)

WHISKY GALORE!

The only amusing famine in movie history is the whiskey famine on the mythical Scottish island of Todday; the wartime ration of whiskey has run out, and the island is devastated by drought. Then a ship bound for the United States with fifty thousand cases of Scotch is wrecked on the shore, and the parched islanders take on the sweet task of salvage. Alexander Mackendrick directed this convivial little classic, based on Compton Mackenzie's novel "Whisky Galore," adapted by Mackenzie and Angus MacPhail. With Joan Greenwood, Gordon Jackson, Basil Radford, Mackenzie himself, and a contingent of gloomy Scots. Photographed on Barra, the Hebrides. Released in 1949. —*P.K.* (Rubin Museum of Art; Sept. 5.)

Also Playing

COLLEGE: In wide release. **THE LONGSHOTS:** In wide release. **THE ROCKER:** In wide release. **SUKIYAKI WESTERN DJANGO:** Angelika Film Center. **YEAR OF THE FISH:** Angelika Film Center.

REVIVALS, CLASSICS, ETC.

Titles with a dagger are reviewed above.

ANTHOLOGY FILM ARCHIVES

32 Second Ave., at 2nd St. (212-505-5181)—"The Best of Laurel and Hardy." Sept. 3 at 7:30: short-film program including "Two Tars" (1928, James Parrott; silent). ♦ Sept. 4 at 7:30: short-film program including "A Perfect Day" (1929, Parrott; silent). ♦ Sept. 5 at 7:30: "Sons of the Desert" (†) "Chickens Come Home" (1931, James W. Horne; silent), and "Big Business" (1929, Horne). ♦ "Goethe-Institut New York Presents." Sept. 4 at 7: "Reichsautobahn" (1985, Hartmut Bitomsky). ♦ The films of Jerry Schatzberg. Sept. 5 at 7 and Sept. 7 at 9:15: "Puzzle of a Downfall Child" (1970). The Sept. 5 screening will be introduced by the director. ♦ Sept. 5 at 9:30 and Sept. 7 at 4:30: "The Panic in Needle Park" (1971). The Sept. 5 screening will be introduced by the director. ♦ Sept. 6 at 4:30 and Sept. 9 at 7: "The Seduction of Joe Tynan" (1979). ♦ Sept. 6 at 7 and Sept. 8 at 9: "Scarecrow" (1973). ♦ Sept. 6 at 9:30 and Sept. 8 at 7: "Street Smart" (†). ♦ Sept. 7 at 7 and Sept. 9 at 9:15: "Reunion" (1989). ♦ "Essential Cinema." Sept. 6 at 5:30: "A Sixth of the World" (1926, Dziga Vertov; silent). ♦ Sept. 6-7 at 7 and 7:30: "Flaming Creatures" (1963, Jack Smith) and "Scotch Tape" (1962, Smith). ♦ Sept. 7 at 5:30: "Forward, Soviet!" (1925-26, Vertov; silent).

BAM ROSE CINEMAS

30 Lafayette Ave., Brooklyn (718-636-4100)—In revival. Sept. 3 at 4:30, 6:50, and 9:15: "They Live" (1988, John Carpenter). ♦ Sept. 4 at 6:50 and 9:15: "Escape from New York" (1981, Carpenter). ♦ Sept. 5-7 at 2, 4:30, 6:50, and 9:15 and Sept. 8-11 at 4:30, 6:50, and 9:15: "The 39 Steps" (1935, Alfred Hitchcock).

FILM FORUM

W. Houston St. west of Sixth Ave. (212-727-8110)—"The French Crime Wave." All films are in French. Sept. 3 at 1:30, 5:20, and 9:10 and Sept. 4 at 1 and 4:50: "Quai des Orfèvres" (1947, Henri-Georges Clouzot). ♦ Sept. 3 at 3:30 and 7:20 and Sept. 4 at 3: "Pépé le Moko" (1937, Julien Duvivier). ♦ Sept. 4 at 7 and 9:40: "The Wages of Fear" (1942, Clouzot). ♦ Aug. 28 at 1:30, 5:40, and 9:50: "Un Flic" (1972, Jean-Pierre Melville). ♦ Sept. 5-11 at 1, 2:40, 4:20, 6, 7:45, and 9:30: "Shoot the Piano Player" (1960, François Truffaut).

IFC CENTER

323 Sixth Ave., at W. 3rd St. (212-924-7771)—In revival. Sept. 3-4 (call for showtimes): "Day of Wrath" (1943, Carl Theodor Dreyer; in Danish). ♦ Sept. 5-7 at 11 A.M.: "The Devil's Eye" (1960, Ingmar Bergman; in Swedish). ♦ "Waverly Midnights." Sept. 5-6: "You Are What You Eat" (1968, Barry Feinstein).

MUSEUM OF MODERN ART

Roy and Niuta Titus Theatres, 11 W. 53rd St. (212-708-9480)—"Still Moving." Sept. 3-5 at 1:30: "They Shoot Horses, Don't They?" (1969, Sydney Pollack). ♦ "Jazz Score." Sept. 4 at 6:30: "She's Gotta Have It" (1986, Spike Lee) and "George Dumpson's Place" (1965, Ed Emshwiller). ♦ Sept. 5 at 6 and Sept. 7 at 5:15: "Naked Lunch" (1991, David Cronenberg) and "Population Explosion" (1967, Pierre Hébert). ♦ Sept. 6 at 6:15 and Sept. 8 at 8:45: "Emergency Kisses" (†) and "Sausage City" (1974, Adam Beckett). ♦ Sept. 6 at 8:30 and Sept. 8 at 6:15: "Dr. Akagi" (1998, Shohei Imamura; in Japanese and German).

RUBIN MUSEUM OF ART

150 W. 17th St. (212-620-5000, ext. 344)—"Cabaret Cinema." Sept. 5 at 9:30: "Whisky Galore!" (†), introduced by Andrew Weir.

WALTER READE THEATRE

Lincoln Center (212-875-5600)—The films of Charlton Heston. Sept. 3 at 1 and Sept. 4 at 8:30: "Earthquake" (1974, Mark Robson). ♦ Sept. 3 at 3:30: "Major Dundee" (1965, Sam Peckinpah). ♦ Sept. 4 at 2:30: "El Cid" (1961, Anthony Mann). ♦ Sept. 4 at 6:15: "Touch of Evil" (1958, Orson Welles). ♦ "Latin Beat." All films are in Spanish unless otherwise noted. Sept. 5 at 1 and Sept. 6 at 2:45: "Cochochi" (2007, Laura Amelia Guzmán and Israel Cárdenas; in Raramuri). ♦ Sept. 5 at 2:50 and Sept. 8 at 5: "The Path" (2007, Ishtar Yasin Gutierrez). ♦ Sept. 5 at 4:40 and Sept. 6 at 1: "Still Orangutans" (2007, Gustavo Spolidoro; in Portuguese). ♦ Sept. 5 at 6:30, Sept. 6 at 8:45, and Sept. 7 at 1: "Kill Them All" (2007, Esteban Schroeder). ♦ Sept. 5 at 9, Sept. 6 at 6:45, and Sept. 8 at 3: "The Pope's

JASHAR AWAN

Toilet" (2007, César Charlone and Enrique Fernández). ♦ Sept. 6 at 4:30 and Sept. 8 at 7: "Postcards from Leningrad" (2007, Mariana Rondón). ♦ Sept. 7 at 3:30: "Man of Two Havanas" (2007, Vivien Lesnik Weisman; in Spanish and English). ♦ Sept. 7 at 5:45 and Sept. 9 at 3:30: "The Old Thieves: The Legends of Artegio" (2007, Everardo González). ♦ Sept. 7 at 8: "Dog Eat Dog" (2008, Carlos Moreno). ♦ Sept. 8 at 9:15: "Estômago: A Gastronomic Story" (2007, Marcos Jorge; in Portuguese).

READINGS AND TALKS

MCNALLY JACKSON BOOKS
Sept. 4 at 7: The writers Robert Sullivan, Nathaniel Rich, and Ian Parker read from "Names on the Land: A Historical Account of Place-Naming in the United States," a 1945 book by George R. Stewart that was recently republished by N.Y.R.B. Classics, a book-publishing arm of *The New York Review of Books*. With Matt Weiland, who wrote the introduction to the new edition, and Edwin Frank, the editor of the press. ♦ Sept. 9 at 7: Daphne Beal reads from her début novel, "In the Land of No Right Angles." (52 Prince St. No tickets necessary.)

NATIONAL ARTS CLUB
The "Page" readings series gets under way for the season with appearances by Diane William and Christine Schutt, who will be reading from their new fiction. (15 Gramercy Park S. No tickets necessary. Sept. 5 at 7.)

92ND STREET Y
The former Mets players Keith Hernandez, Darryl Strawberry, and Ron Darling talk with the Mets announcer Gary Cohen about their days at the soon-to-be-demolished Shea Stadium. (Lexington Ave. at 92nd St. 212-415-5500. Sept. 7 at 8.)

"UPSTAIRS AT THE SQUARE"
The pairing of musicians and writers at the Union Square Barnes & Noble continues, with appearances by the singer-songwriter Greg Laswell and the journalist David Carr, whose latest book, "The Night of the Gun," is an account of his recovery from drug addiction. (33 E. 17th St. No tickets necessary. Sept. 9 at 7.)

ABOVE AND BEYOND

JOHN CAGE BIRTHDAY TRIBUTE
Dancers, poets, actors, and artists honor the late composer by presenting a piece of his work or their own work. Past participants have included Laurie Anderson, Theo Bleckman, and Pauline Oliveros, and the only stipulation is that performers spend no more than four minutes and thirty-three seconds onstage (a length of time taken, of course, from Cage's 1952 composition "4' 33" "). This year's tribute includes a screening of excerpts from the documentary "Variations VII," a newly released DVD containing archival footage of the seminal 1966 performance of "Variations VII" at the 69th Regiment Armory, on Twenty-sixth Street, which employed Geiger counters, open telephone lines, television sets, radios, and other technological devices. This portion of the celebration will last a little longer than the others—about ten times as long. (St. Mark's In-the-Bowery, Second Ave. at 10th St. No tickets necessary. Sept. 5 at 7:30.)

AUCTIONS AND ANTIQUES
Christie's three-day "Interiors" sale (Sept. 3-5) is the kickoff to New York's fall auctions season, a stockpile of beguiling objects and furniture (a pair of gold-hued suède ottomans, a pagoda-shaped étagère decorated with Japanese scenes, and the like) for the eclectically minded buyer with rooms to fill. Things get a little more serious at the house's first-ever sale devoted exclusively to contemporary design (Sept. 8), which offers items by many of the current big names in high-concept furnishings, including Zaha Hadid, Ron Arad, Marc Newson, and Maarten Baas. Looking back a generation, the Japanese designer Shiro Kuramata is represented by two luminous works: a cheerful multicolored acrylic cabinet (from 1989) and a stunning laminated glass chair (from 1976). Contemporary art goes on the block the following day (Sept. 9) in a "First Open" sale that features a photograph by Cindy Sherman (one of her numerous "film stills"). (20 Rockefeller Plaza, at 49th St. 212-636-2000.) ♦ **Phillips** warms up with a selling exhibition of works by the Argentinean-born artist Grillo Demo (Sept. 5-27), whose creations are collected by the likes of Kate Moss and Naomi Campbell. Demo's work, which includes paintings, lamps, collages, and monumental ceramic vases, is sunny, glamorous, and saturated with color—just like the paradise island of Ibiza, where he lives. (450 W. 15th St. 212-940-1200.)

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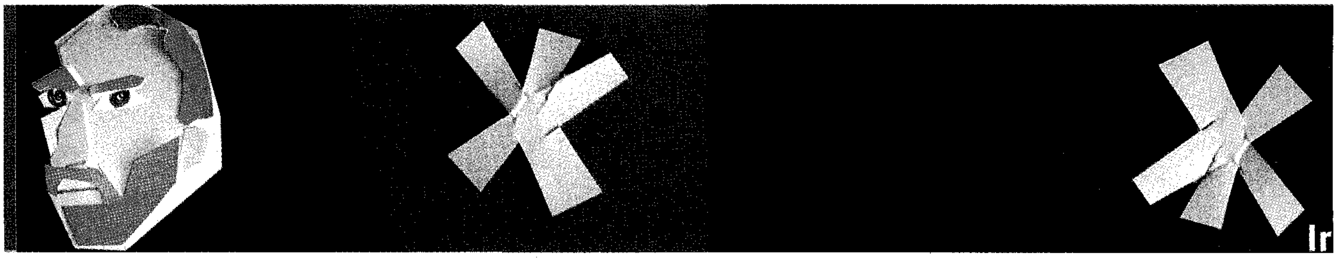
Visit the Goings On blog, at www.newyorker.com/go/goingson, for additional cultural coverage and commentary.



LAURIE ROSENWALD

ON THE HORIZON

CLASSICAL MUSIC
ANCIENT EVENINGS
Sept. 13, Sept. 16-17

George Steel is leaving to take over the Dallas Opera, but Miller Theatre goes on, with the American première of "Oresteia," an opera by the late Greek master Iannis Xenakis—the largest production ever mounted at the house. (212-854-7799.)

THE THEATRE
ARKADINA & CO.
Sept. 16

The Royal Court Theatre production of Chekhov's "The Seagull" that played in London's West End last year is coming to the Walter Kerr. London stage veteran Kristin Scott Thomas makes her Broadway début, as does Peter Sarsgaard, alongside Mackenzie Crook (recognizable from the British version of "The Office") and Zoe Kazan. Ian Rickson directs. (212-239-6200.)

ART
ALL ABOUT EVE
Sept. 21-Jan. 5

"Van Gogh and the Colors of the Night," at MOMA, is the first show to explore the Dutch painter's fascination with painting the world after dark. Some forty works, including the iconic canvases "The Starry Night" and "The Potato Eaters," will be on view, as will a selection of van Gogh's letters and epistolary sketches. (212-708-9400.)

MOVIES
BEST OF THE FEST
Sept. 26-Oct. 12

Among the eagerly anticipated offerings at the forty-sixth edition of the New York Film Festival are Matteo Garrone's "Gomorrah," about the Neapolitan Mafia; Jia Zhangke's "24 City," about the lives of working women in China from the nineteen-fifties to the present; Steven Soderbergh's four-hour-long "Che," starring Benicio del Toro; and Hong Sang-Soo's "Night and Day," about a South Korean artist in Paris.

NIGHT LIFE
SIREN SONGS
Oct. 3

Two grand female vocalists, the Cape Verdean diva Cesária Évora and the Billie Holiday-esque Madeleine Peyroux, share a grand stage, Carnegie Hall. (carnegiehall.org.)

"Van Gogh and the Colors of the Night," at MOMA.

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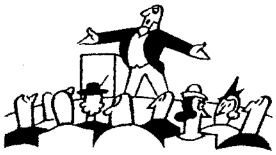
THE NEW YORKER

THE TALK OF THE TOWN

COMMENT
CONVENTIONAL BATTLE

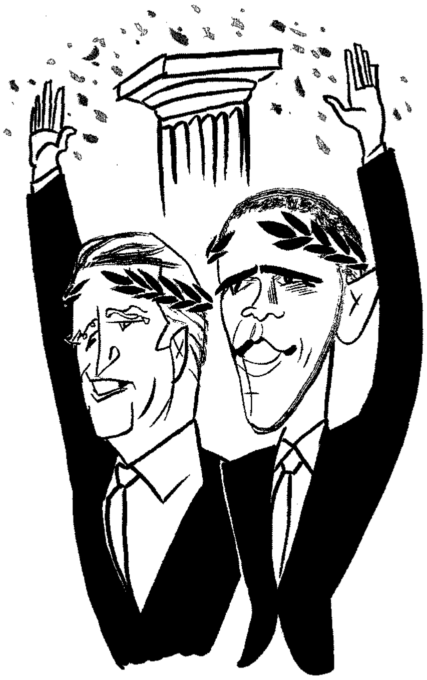


In the summer of 1960, Norman Mailer took an assignment to cover the Democratic Convention in Los Angeles. This was when conventions could still be the scenes of smoky, unpredictable battle, and on this occasion the improbably junior senator from Massachusetts, John Kennedy, who had won most of the primaries, was forced to fend off last-minute challenges from the Senate Majority Leader, Lyndon Johnson, and from the Party's nominee in 1952 and 1956, Adlai Stevenson. Then, having overcome the opposition of Eleanor Roosevelt and the plots of the Party elders, Kennedy turned to Johnson and asked him to be his running mate against Richard Nixon and Henry Cabot Lodge, Jr. Mailer wrote his article in a mythmaking frame of mind—the title was "Superman Comes to the Supermarket"—and he was determined to invest his protagonist and the times with the maximum sense of destiny. Senator Kennedy, he wrote, "was unlike any politician who had ever run for President in the history of the land, and if elected he would come to power in a year when America was in danger of drifting into a profound decline."

The Democratic Convention last week in Denver was not the "pig-rooting, horse-snorting, band-playing, voice-screaming medieval get-together" of Mailer's yesteryear. But, no matter how frictionless the stagecraft and Hellenic the actual stage, the sense of historic moment in Denver was far more profound than it was in Los Angeles forty-eight years ago. The nominee, Barack Obama, and the would-be-but-not-quite nominee, Hillary Clinton, did battle with central taboos of Presidential politics: Obama, of course, is the first African-American to capture a major-party nomination; Clinton is the first woman to contend seriously for the Presidency, winning a primary even on the day she lost the big prize. Obama's nomination and Clinton's near-miss are, in their way, belated fulfillments of the promises of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, the Voting Rights Act of 1965, the Seneca Falls Convention of 1848, and the Nineteenth Amendment. No banality of cable-news commentary—not even the mad bickering among the anchors on MSNBC—could eclipse the meaning and the emotion of their prolonged race, the Party's dramatic reconciliation, and Obama's fiercely eloquent acceptance speech.

The Convention suggested possibility and hope even with the Bush Administration, arguably the worst in history, still in power, and with the Republican nominee's poll ratings seeming to pop precisely when he resorts to the tactics of his old nemesis, Karl Rove. The sense of national drift is no longer a novelist's overheated conceit. Obama was careful to keep the mood focussed on better days and not signal despair, but, as he made plain, American decline, in economic, political, and moral terms, is an undeniable diagnosis.

The success of Obama's convention in Denver was of a piece with the nineteen months of the Obama campaign. It was a disciplined, well-paced, sometimes moving production; no one stepped out of line and there were only a few bombs (e.g., Mark Warner). The curtain-raising media narrative about the Clintons turned out to be so preposterously inflated that it allowed both Bill and Hillary to execute easy maneuvers of rhetorical and emotional jujitsu, repairing his reputation of late for narcissistic resentment and hers for a confounded petulance in defeat. Edward Kennedy magisterially demanded the endurance of the Party by bravely displaying his own. Michelle Obama tore up the wing-nut caricatures of herself as a closet radical by revealing, without exploiting, the irresistible charms of her children and delivering a warm, genuine, and impassioned introduction to her husband.



ILLUSTRATIONS BY TOM BACHTELL

John Kerry was uncommonly forceful, even alighting upon an important subject left alone by Obama: the shame of American torture and the need to shut down the prison at Guantánamo Bay. The Ohio governor, Ted Strickland, got off the best, unheard line of the Convention when he said that, unlike George H. W. Bush, who was born on third base and thought he hit a triple, George W. was born on third base and stole second. Even Montana's stoutly appealing governor, Brian Schweitzer, performed with a cuff-shooting, shoulder-shrugging panache. Who knew that Buddy Hackett was a Catholic rancher in a bolo tie?

Obama's decision to deliver his speech outdoors in the vast, in-season corral of the Denver Broncos was clearly meant to "play big" in theatrical terms as well as lay down, for the historically minded, mystic chords of memory evoking Kennedy's "New Frontier" acceptance speech, at the L.A. Memorial Coliseum, and Roosevelt's "rendezvous with destiny" speech, at his renomination in 1936, at Franklin Field, in Philadelphia. The Greek columns onstage summoned Soldier Field, in Chicago, the White House colonnade, and the Lincoln Memorial and Martin Luther King, Jr.,'s "I Have a Dream" speech, if not Demosthenes rallying the Athenians against the Macedonian threat. Team Obama does not do modest Off-Broadway productions.

The imperative for historical change was the nominee's theme in Denver, as it has been since he announced his candidacy, nineteen months ago, in Springfield:

> Tonight, I say to the people of America, to Democrats and Republicans and Independents across this great land—enough! This moment—this election—is our chance to keep, in the twenty-first century, the American promise alive. Because next week, in Minnesota, the same party that brought you two terms of George Bush and Dick Cheney will ask this country for a third. And we are here because we love this country too much to let the next four years look just like the last eight. On November 4th, we must stand up and say: "Eight is enough."

Obama did not follow the rhetorical lead of the Presidents he invoked by name and symbol. At Franklin Field, F.D.R. made reference to "the immortal Dante" and the weighing of "divine justice"; at the Coliseum, J.F.K. quoted the prophet Isaiah and touched on Cromwell, Henry II, and Lloyd George; in Denver, Obama restrained his penchant for rhetorical filigree. (For the culturally disadvantaged, "Eight Is Enough" is a reference to a Dick Van Patten sitcom of the late seventies.) And yet his moments of homey sloganeering worked, especially in combination with his rigorous attacks on the Republican record and a newly specific sense of where he wants to lead the country. His call to arms and unity was plaintive and affecting: "We are a better country than this."

Obama has been more moving at the lectern—at the Convention in Boston four years ago, when he relied mainly on the story of his modest, yet remarkable, multicultural upbringing; at the victory party after the breakthrough win in Iowa, last January—but he has never described himself and his political vision with more clarity. In order to win the votes of the unconvinced, he could not allow "change" to remain an airy mantra. (If anything, he risked the specificity and length of a Clintonian State of the Union address.) Obama was also newly and surprisingly direct in his assault on John McCain—whose policy differences with the Bush Administration have narrowed to the vanishing point—and even questioned his opponent's "temperament and judgment."

In 1960, Mailer described Kennedy in terms that recall caricatures of Obama: J.F.K. "seemed at times like a young professor whose manner was adequate for the classroom, but whose mind was off in some intricacy of the Ph.D. thesis he was writing." Obama set aside his occasional lofty reserve and gave what for him was a barnburner. And yet his talent, particularly evident in Denver, is to transform righteous anger into meliorist fervor, a tone that could draw votes in Colorado and Virginia, as well as in New York and California.

For eight years, we've had a President who has a faith-based relationship with his own "gut," a serene confidence undisturbed by reality. Obama, emerging as a candidate to succeed him, has demonstrated distinct evidence of a first-class intelligence and a first-class temperament. That seemed to leave experience—the length of Obama's résumé—as a Republican angle of attack. Then came Friday morning. On his seventy-second birthday, John McCain selected as his running mate Sarah Palin, a social conservative who spent the nineties embroiled in the civic affairs of Wasilla, Alaska (pop. 6,715), won the Alaska governorship only two years ago, and has zero experience in national politics and world affairs—a baffling rejoinder to the assuring nomination of Joe Biden and to the historic achievement of Barack Obama.

—*David Remnick*

BUTTING HEADS

PALIN ON OBAMA

Before she was running against him, Sarah Palin—the governor of Alaska and now the Republican candidate for Vice-President of the United States—thought it was pretty neat that Barack Obama was edging ahead of John McCain in her usually solidly red state. After all, she said, Obama's campaign was using the same sort of language that she had in her gubernatorial race. "The theme of our campaign was 'new energy,' " she said recently. "It was no more status quo, no more politics as usual, it was all about change. So then to see that Obama—literally, part of his campaign uses those themes, even, new energy, change, all that, I think, O.K., well, we were a little bit ahead on that." She also noted, "Something's kind of changing here in Alaska, too, for being such a red state on the Presidential level. Obama's doing just fine in polls up here, which is kind of wigging people out, because they're saying, 'This hasn't happened for decades that in polls the D' "—the Democratic candidate—" 'is doing just fine.' To me, that's indicative, too. It's the no-more-status-quo, it's *change*."

This was two weeks ago, at the statehouse in Juneau. After persistent reports, in July, that Palin was on McCain's short list of potential running mates, her name had faded back into obscurity. Nobody in Alaska seemed to take her seriously as a national prospect, and she had shrugged the whole thing off on television, telling CNBC's Larry Kudlow that, before considering the job, she would want to know "what is it, exactly, that the V.P. does every day." Now, at the statehouse, she sat, unattended by aides, curled up in a cardigan, and explained that what she had done every day since becoming governor was to stick her thumb in the eye of Alaska's Republican Party establishment. "The

G.O.P. leader of the state—we haven't spoken since I got elected," she said.

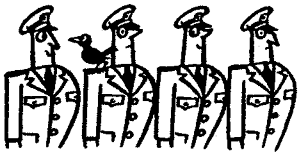
She went on, "I guess if you take the individual issues, two that I believe would be benchmarks showing whether you're a hard-core Republican conservative or not, would be: I'm a lifetime member of the N.R.A.—but this is Alaska, who isn't?—and I am pro-life, absolutely." She continued, "I guess that puts me in a box of being hard-core Republican." But she said she recognized that "the Democrats also preach individual freedoms and individual rights, capitalism, free market, let-it-do-its-thing-best, let people keep as much of their money that they earn as possible. And when it comes to, like, the Party machine, no one will accuse me of being partisan."

So the possibility that Obama might win Alaska did not worry Palin: "Turning maybe purple in the state means, to me, it's more independent, it's not the obsessive partisanship that gets in the way of doing what's right for this state, and I think on a national level that's what we're gonna see." And she added, "That's why McCain is the candidate for the G.O.P.—because he's been known as the maverick, as the conduit for some change." In the state's Republican caucus, McCain came in fourth, trailing Ron Paul. "I always looked at Senator McCain just as a Joe Blow public member, looking from the outside in," she said. "He's been buttin' heads with Republicans for years, and that's a healthy place to be." Then again, on McCain's signature issue—the prosecution of the war in Iraq—she did not sound so gung-ho. Her son is a soldier, and she said, "I'm a mom, and my son is going to get deployed in September, and we better have a real clear plan for this war. And it better not have to do with oil and dependence on foreign energy."

—*Philip Gourevitch*

THE HOME FRONT

VETS FOR DEMOCRATS



Last Wednesday, on the morning of Securing America's Future day at the Democratic National Convention, Jon Kuniholm stood in the lobby of the Pepsi Center—a big man with the face of a studious boy, filling up every inch of a conservative gray suit whose right sleeve ended in a gleaming prosthetic hook. A former Marine captain, Kuniholm still cuts his hair military style, shaved on the sides and short on top. "It makes the conversation shorter," he said. "Instead of asking, 'How'd you lose your arm?' people just say, 'Iraq?' "

On New Year's Day, 2005, Kuniholm's right arm below the elbow was shredded by a homemade bomb packed into a can of olive oil, near the Sunni town of Haditha. At the time, he was serving as a platoon leader in a battalion of as few as six hundred and fifty marines, who had been given the impossible mission of trying to control an insurgent-ridden area the size of three counties in his native North Carolina.

Wednesday was Kuniholm's thirty-seventh birthday, and he was in Denver to vouch for Barack Obama. He and a small group of young men sporting "Veterans for Obama" buttons went out drinking at the Wynkoop Brewing Company. One of them was Richard Smith, a twenty-three-year-old from Florida, with a receding hairline and an air of angry excitement. "Four months ago, I was a buck sergeant in Afghanistan," Smith said over a pitcher of porter and the noise of a bar band. "And I stood on the stage of the Democratic National Convention tonight? It's ridiculous." He was staying at a Motel 6, paying his expenses out of his only source of income, the G.I. Bill—the new version of which, he pointed out, Obama worked hard to pass, while McCain didn't bother to show up for the vote on it. The subject of a bracelet that Obama wears on his wrist came up. It was given to him by the mother of a soldier killed in Iraq. "Here's the thing—have you heard Obama say that?" Smith said. "Every time John McCain appears before a veterans' group, he makes a point of noting that he wears the bracelet of an Iraq veteran who was killed."

Smith grew up poor, with Republican leanings. On Halloween night in 1996, when he was twelve, he went trick-or-treating as Bob Dole. But he enlisted straight out of high school, and his views began to change. "I never agreed with the war in Iraq," Smith said. "But I didn't want to serve in this era and not deploy." In early 2007, he got his wish. "When I got over there, it was almost more of an atrocity that we were still in Afghanistan than that we were in Iraq," he said. "I'd like to personalize that for you."

Eyes alight, Smith leaned forward and described how his battalion lost a paratrooper in the district of Sangin; he helped carry the flag-draped coffin onto a C-17. But, soon after his unit left Afghanistan, in April, "the Taliban were back in Sangin, because we didn't have the troops to hold that city." Smith now lives in Huntsville, Alabama, where he is Obama's point man for veterans statewide. "I was told I've got the hardest job in the campaign. I've got to explain to veterans in Alabama that a liberal black attorney is better for them than a conservative white war hero. It's true—but it's a hard sell in Alabama."

Kuniholm pointed out that Obama has raised six times as much money from service members overseas as McCain has, and that his ratings from Disabled American Veterans are much higher. "The McCain campaign can rant however it wants to," Smith said, "but, when you look at the records, McCain hasn't been there for veterans. At the end of the day, his support for veterans has been bankrupt."

"There's been a lot of rhetoric from the right that seeks to use veterans as a human shield," Kuniholm said. "That's what I'm going to talk about tomorrow." It was well past midnight, and Kuniholm had to get up early to put the finishing touches on his speech. The next day, he stood on the stage at Invesco Field just a few hours before the nominee himself. "The best way you can thank me for my service and sacrifice," Kuniholm told the huge crowd, "is to vote for Barack Obama."

—*George Packer*

WOULDA SHOULDA COULDA

THE BILL AND HILL ERA

The Clinton Era at the Democratic National Convention (and two days out of a four-day event is an era, maybe an epoch, possibly an age) dawned at 8:38 P.M., Mountain Time, on Tuesday. The opening act—a lapsed Republican, a retired admiral, a motley crew of governors—had come and gone, the houselights in the Pepsi Center had dimmed, and the introductory film unspooled. On the giant telescreens flanking and facing the lectern, a fuzzy black-and-white snapshot of Baby Hillary appeared. When the lights came up again, there she was, all blond hair and burnt-peach gabardine, waving and smiling and striding and clapping.

High, high up in the cheap seats, a woman named Judi Lanza (“like Mario”) listened to the speech. Lanza is a registered nurse from Goffstown, New Hampshire. Last fall, Hillary came to Lanza’s house for a roundtable on health care. Lanza has pictures to prove it—Hillary in the Lanzas’ dining room, flanked by Judi; her husband, Joseph, a retired cop turned truck driver; and their three grown kids, Joseph, Jr., Jennifer, and Jeffrey. Judi just missed getting to be a delegate, so she came to the Convention on her own, as a volunteer. She listened hard. When Hillary said, “I will always remember the young man in a Marine Corps T-shirt who waited months for medical care,” Judi teared up a little. And when Hillary said, “Those are the reasons I ran for President. Those are the reasons I support Barack Obama. And those are the reasons you should, too,” Lanza—eyes fixed on the little screen of her video camera, a firm set to her round chin—nodded vigorously.

“I’ve been calling my friends, trying to convince them to go with Obama,” Lanza said after the benediction. “I met her again, after she conceded, on her unity day, in New Hampshire. Him, too. She said she remembered me.”

A couple of hours later, at a party thrown by MSNBC at the art-filled home of Scott Coors, a liberal outlier in a family that has funnelled mighty rivers of beer money to conservative think tanks, three media heavies, middle-aged men to a man, discussed the speech.

“It depends on what you compare it to,” said Heavy No. 1. “It was pretty damn generous compared to Teddy in 1980.”

“Yeah,” said No. 2. “Teddy, like, turned his back on Carter. Might’ve cost him the election.”

“It would’ve been nice if she’d made some argument for Obama besides that he’s the nominee of the Democratic Party,” said No. 3.

“Yeah, like something specific about him. Half her speech was about herself.”

“Woulda, shoulda, coulda. Give her a break. Maybe the speech wasn’t as good as it shoulda been, but it was a hell of a lot better than it coulda been. She did what she had to do. Maybe more.”

“Bill, though. Tomorrow night.”

“The big dog.”

“Yeah. Supposedly it’s the only speech the Obama people haven’t vetted.”

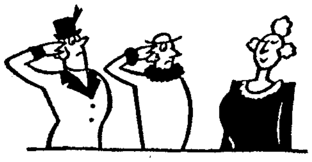
“No, Hillary’s, too. But yeah, Bill. That’s the key.”

By the time the big dog rolled out onto the stage the next night, Obama’s nomination had gone from presumptive to official. Relaxing in her seat near the New York standard, Rosina Rubin, a passionate Hillary delegate from Rockland County, was starting to feel better about the whole thing. The roll call hadn’t been disruptive or divisive or any of that. It was first-rate theatre, and the moment when Clinton herself appeared on the floor and moved to nominate Obama by acclamation seemed to provide some of the promised catharsis.

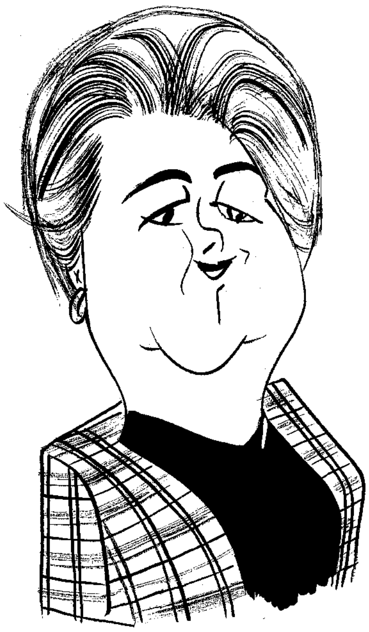
After Bill’s speech—which, in case you haven’t heard, featured all the “shoulda”s Hillary’s didn’t—Rubin felt just fine. “That was electrifying,” she said. “It’s such a clichéd thing to say, but this feels like a cleansing, a healing that allows the page to be turned. I’ve talked to a lot of women who worked for Barack Obama. Somehow they weren’t feeling the joy they should have. Something was missing. I think that’s over. There’s joy in the house.”

—*Hendrik Hertzberg*

SISTERHOOD DEPT.
CONVERT



Rosalind Wyman—seventy-seven years old; doughty feminist; political fund-raiser and philanthropist; hostess to J.F.K., Jimmy Carter, and Bill Clinton, and Hollywood types too numerous to count; youngest elected member of the Los Angeles City Council (at the age of twenty-two); first woman to run a national political convention (the Democrats in San Francisco, 1984)—may well be the most indomitable member of Hillary Clinton’s Sisterhood of the Travelling Pants Suits. She was deeply sorry that Clinton did not win the nomination, and does not believe that she will ever see her become President: “Not in my lifetime.” Nevertheless, she declares herself eager to work for Barack Obama’s candidacy, and she believes that virtually all of Clinton’s supporters will vote for him in November. “Absolutely,” she said last Wednesday, at Bravo! Ristorante, at the Denver Sheraton. “I’ll tell you one reason why. Those women are petrified about the Court—that Roe v. Wade is through. I will stake my sixty years in politics on this: they will come over.”



Rosalind Wyman

Wyman’s own pants suit that day was a cheerful robin’s-egg blue, and she appeared more carefully coiffed and less weary than the average delegate. She had sharp words for the press. She has known Chris Matthews, the MSNBC commentator, “since he was a pup,” working as a top aide to Tip O’Neill; last October, she wrote Matthews a furious letter after he told Obama, on “Hardball,” precisely how to attack Clinton in the upcoming Philadelphia debate. (“Every word she has spoken says yes to the status quo”; “She just voted with the hawks to target Iran!”) In her letter, Wyman informed Matthews, “Your mentor really would not have been pleased today.”

As for the charges of sexism during the primary, Wyman said, “That’s politics.” She recalled, with some amusement, Richard Nixon’s victory in his 1950 Senate race against Helen Gahagan Douglas, in which Nixon called Douglas the "Pink Lady"—"pink right down to her underwear." (Nixon's strategist, Murray Chotiner: "The purpose of an election is not to defeat your opponent but to destroy him.") Wyman remains concerned about racism among voters, but she was involved in Tom Bradley's failed 1982 campaign for governor of California—a loss widely ascribed to prejudice—and believes that "the country has come a long way since then."

"Obama has run an almost perfect campaign," Wyman said. She thinks that his only major tactical error was his refusal of John McCain's challenge to a series of town-hall meetings across the country. "Even if Obama had performed poorly," she said, "he would have done better than McCain."

She was unsparing when talking about Clinton's campaign. She pointed out that Clinton had been ill-served by her feuding campaign advisers. "Hillary clearly let her campaign get away from her," she said. "She has to take responsibility for that." Clinton also made a "terrible mistake" when she failed to anticipate the importance of the caucuses.

Looking ahead, Wyman suggested that Obama can win over skeptical women voters by making a few strategic, if awkward, phone calls. She noted that Sherry Lansing, the former head of Paramount, had "opened her house recently to activist women, to encourage them to support Obama." Senator Dianne Feinstein, of California, who was supposed to rally the group, had broken her ankle, and spoke to the guests by phone. Some of the women were displeased to hear that Obama had not yet called Lansing or Feinstein personally. If you want their support, Wyman said, "you have to reach out to them."

—*Dorothy Wickenden*

AWAY TEAM
PARTY SPOILERS

Tucker Bounds and Michael Goldfarb, two of John McCain's top media operatives, were bent over laptops last Wednesday night in a glass-enclosed room a mile away from the site of the Democratic Convention. They sat, with five other campaign workers, at a conference table surrounded by eight video panels. Senator Evan Bayh, of Indiana, appeared on a screen, and the sound of Democrats jeering in the Pepsi Center roared through the small room.

"Is he getting booed?" Bounds asked eagerly.

"No, they were booing us," Goldfarb said.

The rejuvenation of John McCain's political fortunes in the last month owes a lot to his communications staff. The candidate has abandoned his free-flowing chats with reporters, and remade his campaign into a disciplined vehicle for delivering simple, oft-repeated messages. In Denver, that message was that Obama is "Not Ready '08," a phrase that was plastered on signs around the makeshift McCain office.

For the first two days of the Convention, Goldfarb and Bounds's real allies were Bill and Hillary Clinton. Goldfarb was surprised at how eager the press was to cover the Obama-Clinton squabbling, a story that he and his colleagues advanced by means of a steady diet of quotes and videos showing criticisms of Obama from Hillary, Bill, and even Joe Biden. "There was a pre-written drama here," he said. "All you had to do was light the match."

As Bayh spoke, the team digested his comments and debated avenues of attack. "Why don't we pull out the V.P. research and whack him?" Joe Pounder—his real name—said.

Bounds told Goldfarb to use a quote of Obama's from a 2004 interview, and he quickly pulled it up on his computer. " 'We have to finish the job,' " Bounds read aloud. " 'We owe it not only to the troops who sacrificed their lives, but also the Iraqi people.' " The group synthesized the anti-Bayh research and blasted it to the press in an e-mail.

The headliners for the evening were Biden and Bill Clinton. "Bill is going to be fantastic," Bounds said, "but he's going to be going after us." Goldfarb added, "But he's going to be blinking his endorsement of McCain in Morse code."

Pounder sounded distressed as he read from an online news report about what the former President would say. " 'Bill Clinton will tout Barack Obama's readiness to be Commander-in-Chief,' " Pounder read. It was as if an unreliable new girlfriend were ending a stormy romance with McCain's crew. Eventually, Clinton appeared, live, on one of the screens. "Barack Obama is the man for this job!" Clinton said. The room grew silent. "He wasn't six months ago!" Ben Porritt, a spokesperson, shouted.

"It's the third night of the Convention and someone finally says this guy is ready to be President," Matt McDonald, a skinny thirty-year-old, said. He started dictating to Bounds a possible response.

It took a speech by John Kerry to recapture the good cheer that had characterized the mood in the war room earlier in the evening. "It's amazing that he was the nominee four years ago and no one is carrying him live on TV," McDonald said, scanning the screens.

"God, I wish we were running against this guy," Goldfarb said.

"Those were the greatest days," someone chimed in.

Biden, who, like Clinton, focussed on Obama's readiness to be President, brought the mood in the room down again. But there were some targets of opportunity in his speech.

"We gotta hit him on that!" Goldfarb shouted. "He doesn't know the difference between a battalion and a brigade."

Bounds was also frank about how difficult Biden was to attack. "He's so much more palatable as a Presidential candidate than Obama. He has—"

"Gravitas," another operative finished.

When Obama made his semi-surprise appearance onstage, the room erupted in taunts: "The One is in the building," "The celebrity stole the show," "This is now a rock concert," "Come to my temple!" It seemed a little forced. The McCain operatives were realistic about the fact that as the week wore on it would become more difficult to inject their spin into the Democrats' coverage. "I think the media is starting to get a little sick of us," Goldfarb said.

Someone turned up the volume on a monitor broadcasting Fox News. Fred Barnes, the conservative writer, was enthusiastically reciting the McCain campaign's talking points about Obama's lack of experience. Porritt watched and nodded his head. "Fred Barnes!" he said. "God, I love that guy."

—*Ryan Lizza*

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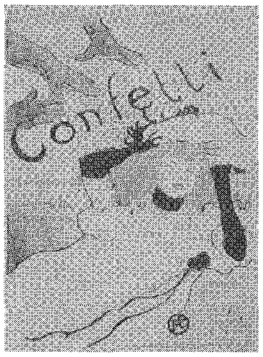

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THE POLITICAL SCENE

PARTY FAITHFUL

Can the Democrats get a foothold on the religious vote?

BY PETER J. BOYER

In the autumn of 1998, when Karl Rove was contriving to make Governor George W. Bush President and to build a lasting Republican majority, he came upon "The Catholic Voter Project," a study of voting behavior in national elections since the Kennedy-Nixon contest of 1960. Catholics make up more than a fourth of the electorate, but they had long defied political targeting. This was because, since 1972, Catholic voters had essentially mirrored the rest of the electorate, making it impossible for political professionals to shape a distinctive Catholic message—or even to know for certain whether there was such a thing. The study, commissioned by the magazine *Crisis*, concluded that the issues that moved Catholic voters could, in fact, be discerned; it was simply a matter of redefining the Catholic vote.

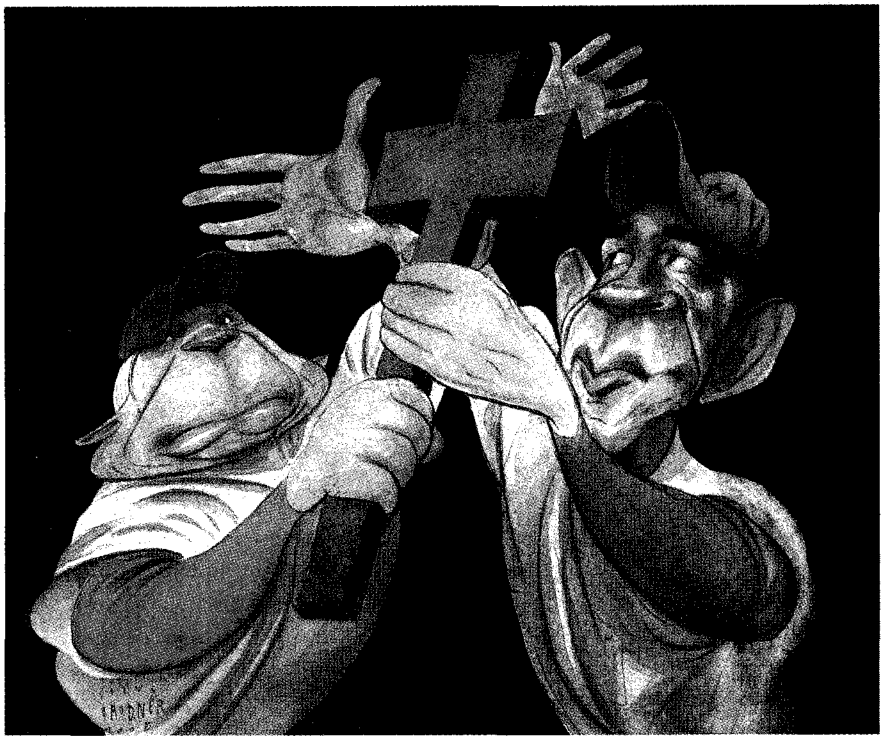
The term "Catholic voter," the study argued, was meaningless, reflecting an answer given to exit pollsters, and not much more. The only relevant Catholic voter was one whose vote was influenced by the fact of being a Catholic. The *Crisis* project compared the voting behaviors of active Catholics—those who regularly attended Mass—and inactive Catholics, and found a clear distinction. Active Catholics characterized themselves as being more conservative than Catholics as a whole, and, although they did not necessarily identify with Republicans, they were in the vanguard of the thirty-year Catholic march out of the Democratic Party. They were patriotic, anti-abortion, and pro-family (believing, for example, that divorce laws should be tightened).

For Rove, the *Crisis* report posed a thrilling prospect, akin to the framing of a new constituency, to be courted and drawn into the Republican base, as Protestant evangelicals had been, two decades earlier. "What I saw," Rove says, "was a group that was searching." After reading the report, Rove telephoned the publisher of *Crisis*, Deal Hudson, who had instigated the study, and invited him to Texas to meet Governor Bush. Hudson liked what Bush had to say, and shortly thereafter he agreed to become an outside adviser on Catholic outreach for the 2000 Presidential campaign. As it turned out, Rove was tapping into something far more profound than voting differences between active and inactive Catholics; he had struck upon a deep current of discontent within the Church, which had been building for nearly forty years, rooted in contending interpretations of the faith.

Rove had chosen the ideal instrument for his Catholic strategy. Hudson was a convert to Catholicism, and, with a convert's zeal, he embraced an undiluted brand of the faith. As a philosophy student in college, in the late nineteen-sixties, and, later, as a professor of philosophy at Mercer University, in Atlanta, Hudson had shunned academic fads—"The Tao of Physics" and the like—and was drawn, instead, to the classics, where he believed the enduring truths resided. He admired Mortimer Adler, who became a friend, and he started his own Great Books courses. Hudson's spiritual migration—he'd been a Southern Baptist minister before his conversion, in 1984—was animated by his wish, as he put it, "to wed the truth of philosophy with revealed truth."

But Hudson's firm doctrinal orthodoxy placed him in the minority within his new faith, as he discovered, to his surprise, soon after taking a teaching job in the philosophy department at Fordham University, a Jesuit institution, in 1989. One day, he was chatting with a sociology professor, a former Jesuit, who asked him why he'd converted. Hudson shared his conversion story, and talked about the perfect accord he'd found in the Catholic faith between mind and soul. His colleague smiled and said, "I used to feel that way, but I don't need it anymore."

"I realized that the Church I had learned to love, and had converted to, was very deep within the detritus of the post-Vatican II confusion," Hudson recalls. He was referring to the contention that followed the Second Vatican Council, which was convened in Rome in 1962 by Pope John XXIII, in the hope of renewing the Church in its mission to present Christ to the world. By the time the Council concluded, four years later, the Church had a new Pope, and a radically transformed understanding of itself. The faithful began to experience changes ranging from a new Mass (said in the vernacular) to the end of meatless Fridays. The progressive wing of the Church felt that Vatican II was a liberation, and invoked its spirit in challenging the faith's core doctrines and theology, often to the point of open dissent. This contingent eventually came to dominate much of the institutional Church, holding sway particularly within the Catholic academy. Catholics who hewed to orthodoxy argued their case on the pages of obscure conservative journals, or from outmanned positions on college faculties, and bided their time. "I realized very quickly that I was going to be a culture warrior within the Church," Hudson says of his arrival at Fordham.



Both candidates sought a religious advantage with their Vice-Presidential choices.

STEVE BRODNER

Hudson thrived at Fordham, where, despite his minority view, he got on well with his colleagues and was popular with his students. He took up writing for Catholic journals, in addition to his scholarly work, and ventured onto the lecture circuit, proving himself to be a natural polemicist. But Hudson became a full-time culture warrior sooner than he may have wished, when his academic career suddenly ended, in 1994. After an evening of partying with a group of students on Shrove Tuesday, the eve of Lent, Hudson had a sexual encounter in his Fordham office with an undergraduate. She later informed her dean, and Hudson was strongly urged by Father Joseph O'Hare, the president of the university, to seek employment elsewhere. A lawsuit filed by the young woman was quietly settled, and nondisclosure agreements were signed by all parties.

Hudson moved his family to Washington, D.C., and began a new life. His ideological kinsman, the writer Michael Novak, needed help at *Crisis*, the Catholic journal he'd co-founded thirteen years earlier, and asked Hudson to become its editor. Hudson agreed, and quickly revitalized the magazine, expanding its subscription base and calling on a network of wealthy, like-minded Catholics for financial support. From his perch at *Crisis*, Hudson became a prominent figure in Catholic Washington, joining an influential circle of opinion-makers as they cheered the efforts of their champion, Pope John Paul II, to reinterpret Vatican II along orthodox lines. They associated themselves with a group of Catholic bishops, fiercely orthodox and devoted to the Pope ("JPII bishops," they were called), who meant to steer the American Church more toward orthodoxy. Hudson was avowedly Republican, but he fretted that the Party was blind to its Catholic opportunity, mistaking Catholics for an ethnic constituency satisfied by Columbus Day speeches and St. Patrick's Day parades. It was this frustration that prompted Hudson to commission the Catholic-vote study, which concluded, somewhat wishfully, that Bob Dole might actually have won the 1996 Presidential election if he had attracted more Catholics in just a handful of states.

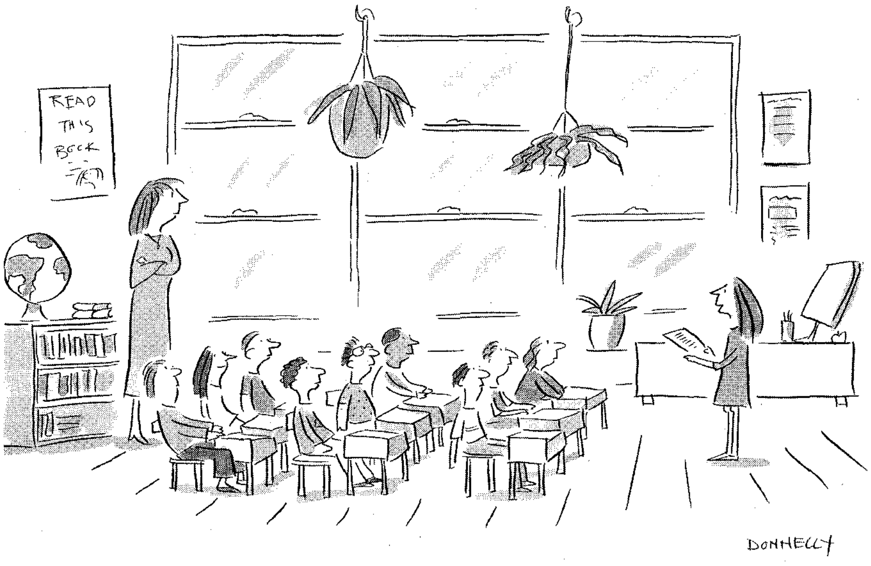
Karl Rove wasn't blind to the Catholic opportunity. When Bush assumed the Presidency, in 2001, Hudson became the volunteer chair of the new Catholic-outreach program of the Republican National Committee. In his book "Onward, Christian Soldiers," Hudson describes himself as "the Catholic gatekeeper" for the White House. The Administration's policies clearly reflected a Catholic influence. On Bush's first workday, he acted to limit federal funding of non-governmental organizations that performed or actively supported abortion as a method of family planning overseas. By the end of his first term, Bush had delivered on every item on a wish list that Hudson says he presented to him at the time of their first formal meeting, in Austin, including its centerpiece, the Partial-Birth Abortion Ban Act, which Bush signed in 2003. That year, Michael Novak explained Bush to an Italian readership in the journal *Studi Cattolici*. "Never have Catholics had so solicitous a friend in the White House," Novak wrote. "So pro-Catholic are the president's ideas and sentiments that there are persistent rumors that, like his brother Jeb, the governor of Florida, G.W. might also become a Catholic."

Hudson's circle of conservative Catholics diminished the authority of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops as the conduit between the Church and the government. "If you wanted to get something to the top inner circles of the White House from a Catholic perspective, you could contact Deal Hudson and it was delivered," William Donohue, the president of the conservative Catholic League for Religious and Civil Rights, has said. Diminished, too, was the bishops' more liberal instruction to the faithful regarding their votes, a construct called "a consistent ethic of life." In choosing a political candidate, the bishops advised their parishioners, they should consider hot-button issues like abortion as being just part of the spectrum of issues that are central to Catholic social teaching, alongside opposition to the death penalty, warfare, and poverty. By 2004, some JPII bishops were positing that John Kerry, a pro-choice Catholic, should be denied Communion, and had even suggested that casting a vote for him might be a sin.

All this helped energize that Catholic cohort which the *Crisis* study had identified as a ready constituency. In 2004, Hudson's outreach team, by blanketing parishes in battleground states with voter guides, working with an e-mail list of a hundred thousand addresses, and sending thousands of volunteers into the field, delivered the Catholic vote to Bush. Hudson's outreach efforts were harmonized with those directed by the evangelical political operative Ralph Reed, a consultant on general voter outreach. Reed, as the head of the Christian Coalition, had largely shaped the religious right and shepherded it into the Republican Party. Rove had engineered a religious political machine that many believed would give Republicans a lasting advantage.

"What Bush did in '04 had never happened before, and it may never happen again," Reed told me recently. In the current Presidential election, that latter possibility actually seems likely. Hudson has played only an attenuated role in this campaign. In midsummer, 2004, during the heat of that campaign, someone at Fordham leaked the records of Hudson's decade-old disgrace; Hudson resigned from the campaign, and as publisher of *Crisis* as well. Rove, who left the White House a year ago, is now dispensing his advice on Fox News and on the editorial pages of the *Wall Street Journal*. Reed, who lost a bid for office in Georgia in 2006, is not officially involved with the McCain campaign. But, where the current election is concerned, the biggest difficulty for Republican religious outreach may be the nominee himself. George Bush is an evangelical who wears his faith on his sleeve, and whom Catholics can imagine as one of their own. When I asked Rove whether John McCain has anything like Bush's purchase on faith-directed voters, he replied, "He does not."

John McCain's accidental education in apocalyptic theology began late last February, on a bright, breezy afternoon in San Antonio. His campaign had arranged for a joint appearance by the candidate and the megachurch pastor John Hagee, who, after months of hesitation, had finally agreed to bestow his endorsement. At that point, McCain had the Republican Presidential nomination in hand, but the Christian right still regarded him with deep misgiving. This was owing, in part, to a sense, widely held by many conservatives, that McCain was really the standard-bearer for the one-man Maverick Party, which made him an unreliable ally in such first-principle matters as gay marriage and judicial appointments. Religious conservatives had been put off by tales of McCain's temper, and by his ungallant termination of his first marriage. They remembered how he had lashed out against their own in 2000, condemning Pat Robertson and Jerry Falwell as "agents of intolerance," and likening them to Louis Farrakhan and the Reverend Al Sharpton. "I am convinced Senator McCain is not a conservative, and, in fact, has gone out of his way to stick his thumb in the eyes of those who are," the evangelical leader James Dobson said in a statement read to a national radio audience on Super Tuesday. "I cannot and I will not vote for Senator John McCain, as a matter of conscience." That week, religious conservatives helped deliver six states to the former Baptist minister Mike Huckabee. When Hagee's endorsement came, three weeks later, McCain hoped that it might begin to repair his relationship with the religious right.



"'What I Did on My Summer Vacation: The Treatment.'"

At their joint appearance, outside a San Antonio hotel on February 27th, McCain and Hagee exchanged a hug and a few moments of mutual praise, and then took questions from the press. Hagee was asked how evangelical Christians might rally to McCain. (McCain would have to stress the right things, such as his pro-life voting record, Hagee said.) McCain was tossed a few campaign-trail standards, questions about improving foreign relations, campaign finance, and the like, and then, suddenly, the tone of the event changed. Someone asked McCain what he thought about Pastor Hagee's views on the end of the world. What about Hagee's writing on Armageddon, the great final conflict between good and evil? Did McCain subscribe to Hagee's view that the Antichrist will be the head of the European Union?

Flummoxed, McCain replied, "All I

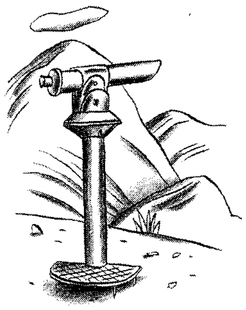
can tell you is that I'm very proud to have Pastor John Hagee's support." He went on, "He has support and respect throughout the nation, and, uh, I've continued to appreciate his support and his advocacy for the freedom and independence of the state of Israel."

McCain stepped back, and looked hopefully to Hagee. "You want to say anything?"

Hagee, a thickset man with a made-for-televangelism baritone, declared, "Our support of Israel has absolutely nothing to do with an end-times, prophetic scenario."

What had been a relatively straightforward political problem for McCain—persuading a skeptical constituency—had suddenly become a vexing eschatological one. Reporters and Internet commentators began to pick through Hagee's writings and sermons, and the McCain campaign found itself trying to explain Hagee's inflammatory interpretations of Scripture, such as his implication that the Roman Catholic Church was the Biblical great whore of Babylon.

Hagee subscribes to a variation of a theology called dispensationalism, which holds that God's human project can be understood schematically, as revealed through Scripture. Formulated and popularized by nineteenth-century Protestant evangelicals in England, dispensationalism offered a system for recognizing, through a literal reading of Scripture, the whole of human history—past, present, and future—explained in seven Biblical ages, or dispensations. American evangelicals found great allure in dispensationalism's hyper-Protestant premise—the divine plan, accessible to all through earnest study—and the system was widely promulgated in this country by evangelists like Dwight L. Moody. The most important fundamentalist text, Cyrus I. Scofield's 1909 Reference Bible, in which the tenets of dispensation are outlined in the margins, sold in the millions, and remains in wide circulation today. Many fundamentalists still accept the dispensationalist view—the late Jerry Falwell was a dispensationalist, as is the Reverend Pat Robertson—and many more are at least familiar with its themes. That is partly because of the spectacular dénouement of the seventh, and final, dispensation—the rapture (sudden heavenly ascent) of saved Christians, followed by a seven-year tribulation, during which the Antichrist and a false prophet will install a one-world religion and the forces of good and evil will clash mightily. After the defeat of the False Messiah, Jesus Christ will return to earth and reign in glory for a thousand years, before engaging Satan in one last battle, at Armageddon.



Because Biblical prophecy is largely a literature of symbolism, end-time theology requires a good deal of interpretation. The apocalyptic visions of the prophet Daniel foresaw the emergence of four beasts from the sea, the second of which was a great bearlike creature; Cold War-era dispensationalists saw this as Russia. Falwell believed that the Antichrist, being a counterfeit of Christ, will of necessity be a male Jew. An interpretation of Revelation 17—"I will show unto thee the judgment of the great whore that sitteth upon many waters. . . . And upon her forehead was a name written, MYSTERY, BABYLON, THE GREAT, THE MOTHER OF HARLOTS AND ABOMINATIONS OF THE EARTH"—had long been thought by some Protestants to refer to the Catholic Church, and is reflected in Scofield: "Ecclesiastical Babylon is all apostate Christendom, in which the Papacy will undoubtedly be prominent."

Dispensationalism sought to unify the Old Testament and the New, and its literal reading of both indicated that God intended to fulfill his promises to Israel. To many fundamentalists, God's vow to Abraham in Genesis, "Unto thy seed I have given this land," meant that a real, political state of Israel would come into existence and that, with Christ's return, human history would culminate there. These fundamentalists are thus inclined toward a muscular Zionism, and Hagee is among the fiercest of the lot; he is the founder of Christians United for Israel, and McCain's friend and colleague Senator Joseph Lieberman has publicly supported the organization.

McCain was hardly equipped to defend Hagee's eschatology. In arranging Hagee's endorsement, McCain's campaign had apparently failed to take note of the clamor that attended Mike Huckabee's appearance at Hagee's Cornerstone Church, just two months earlier. Huckabee simply ignored the protests, but McCain, the presumptive nominee, would not have that option. As blogs and campaign reporters pressed the Hagee issue, McCain at first firmly stood by the pastor ("I'm very proud to have Pastor John Hagee's support"), but he began to back away ("I don't have to agree with everyone that endorses my candidacy"). The controversy was largely driven by one man, the Catholic League's Bill Donohue, whose usual targets are Hollywood and the liberal media. Donohue condemned McCain's association with Hagee the day after the endorsement and vowed to hound McCain until he renounced him. Interview requests spiked, and Donohue happily obliged, campaigning relentlessly against McCain's embrace of the man whom he called "the biggest anti-Catholic bigot in the evangelical community."

One interested observer outside the McCain campaign began to worry that the damage caused by the controversy would extend beyond John McCain. Ralph Reed suggested that Hagee call his friend Deal Hudson to get his advice. Hudson had lunch with Hagee, listened to his end-time theories, and explained to the pastor the Catholic sensitivity to Protestant calumny. (Martin Luther had been among those who first identified the Catholic Church as the whore of Babylon.) Hagee wrote a letter of apology to Donohue, who, after a congenial meeting with Hagee in New York (arranged by Hudson), publicly made peace with the pastor. (Hagee maintains that his invocation of the term "great whore" was never meant to describe the Catholic Church.)

Donohue was satisfied, but the Hagee controversy persisted. By March, the inflammatory sermons of Barack Obama's former pastor, the Reverend Jeremiah Wright, had begun to make headlines, and, for the press, the Hagee issue gave McCain a place of equivalence in the pastor-wars story line. In May, the Huffington Post put up an article citing a decade-old sermon in which Hagee suggested that the Holocaust was part of

God's plan, as it helped usher Jews back to Palestine. Hagee, who had wearied of the dispute, decided to withdraw his endorsement of McCain. McCain took it a step further, renouncing Hagee's endorsement. Later, he characterized Hagee's end-time statements as "crazy and unacceptable." While he was at it, McCain also rejected the endorsement of the Ohio evangelical pastor Rod Parsley, who had made harsh statements about Islam.

Friends of Hagee say that he was deeply pained by McCain's actions, and other evangelical leaders began to feel that their mistrust of McCain had been warranted. Hudson feared that McCain had wrecked Rove's religious machine, which had been so devastating to John Kerry in 2004, before he had even clinched the nomination. Acting on his own, Hudson sent feelers to some evangelical leaders to gauge the possibility of their working together, independently of the McCain campaign, to defeat Obama. "No way," one evangelical told Hudson, declining the offer. "It might help John McCain."

In retrospect, the most important speech at the Democrats' 2004 Convention wasn't the nominee's ("I'm John Kerry, and I'm reporting for duty") but the keynote, delivered by a little-known state senator from Illinois. "We worship an awesome God in the blue states!" Barack Obama intoned. The line, even to the unchurched, sounded like something from a hymn (as was the case). It was a rare thing for a national Democrat to pull a verse from a gospel tune up from his internal playlist, but Obama spoke the phrase credibly, with an easy conviction.

In the sorting out that always follows an election defeat, Democrats decided that Kerry had lost because many voters believed that neither he nor the Democratic Party shared their values. Howard Dean had sensed this as a candidate, but he seemed clueless about how to proceed (citing Job as his favorite book in the New Testament, among many other gaffes). After Nancy Pelosi became Speaker of the House, she commissioned a Democrats' Faith Working Group, a reflexively administrative response to a metaphysical problem.

The most effective Democratic religious outreach has been performed by the Democrat to whom it comes most naturally, Obama. Almost as soon as he joined the Senate, Obama became a prized booking on the speech circuit, where he proved to be fluent in what Jesse Jackson once called "faith talk." Obama spoke forthrightly about his Christian beliefs and about his conversion experience ("Kneeling beneath that cross on the South Side in Chicago, I felt I heard God's spirit beckoning me"), in a way that was hardly customary for Democratic politicians. In casting Republicans as the dangerous God Party, Democrats had turned themselves into the Secular Party so resolutely as to seem almost hostile to religious faith—a perilous position in a country where ninety-two per cent of the population believe in God, more than two-thirds believe in the presence of angels and demons, and nearly a quarter have said that the attacks of September 11, 2001, are prophesied in the Bible.

Obama addressed this problem in a remarkable speech on June 28, 2006, at a gathering of the Christian-left group Call to Renewal, in Washington, in which he offered a frank critique of liberal queasiness regarding faith. "There are some liberals," Obama said, "who dismiss religion in the public square as inherently irrational or intolerant, insisting on a caricature of religious Americans that paints them as fanatical, or thinking that the very word 'Christian' describes one's political opponents, not people of faith."

Echoing the themes of Deal Hudson's 1998 Catholic-voter report, Obama said, "The single biggest gap in party affiliation among white Americans today is not between men and women, or those who reside in so-called red states and those who reside in blue, but between those who attend church regularly and those who don't." He told secularists that they "are wrong when they ask believers to leave their religion at the door before entering into the public square," and suggested that "a sense of proportion should also guide those who police the boundaries between church and state."

He went on, "Not every mention of God in public is a breach to the wall of separation—context matters. It is doubtful that children reciting the Pledge of Allegiance feel oppressed or brainwashed as a consequence of muttering the phrase 'under God.' I didn't. Having voluntary student prayer groups use school property to meet should not be a threat, any more than its use by the High School Republicans should threaten Democrats."

Among those who were impressed by that speech was Douglas Kmiec, a professor of constitutional law at Pepperdine University School of Law, a Christian school in Malibu, California. Kmiec (pronounced Kuh-*meck*) was the embodiment of a Reagan Democrat—a Catholic reared in the Democratic Party, who felt that he had been driven into Republican arms by the leftward lurch of the McGovern-era Democrats. When Kmiec turned Republican, he did so with a vengeance. He worked in the Reagan Justice Department (sharing an office with Samuel Alito), and, as it happens, when George W. Bush was elected he returned to Washington from California—he had gone there to teach at Pepperdine—as the dean of Catholic University's Columbus School of Law, spending time with fellow Federalist Society members such as Antonin Scalia and Alito. His son, Keenan, clerked for Alito at the Third Circuit Court of Appeals, and for John Roberts at the Supreme Court. Kmiec's advice on judicial appointments was heard by the White House, and he was himself considered a candidate for the federal bench. Kmiec was the sort of Republican jurist—smart, devoutly Catholic, and a committed pro-lifer—that Democrats had learned to fear.

After returning to Pepperdine, Kmiec was recruited by Mitt Romney to be the chairman of the Committee for the Courts and the Constitution, for Romney's Presidential campaign. In the era of judicial-appointment wars, such committees are a way of signalling to the Republican base that the candidate is right on such issues as abortion, and Kmiec's association with Romney was meant to give a pro-life seal of approval to a candidate who was once pro-choice. Kmiec became a Romney true believer, and, when Romney withdrew from the race, Kmiec found himself without a Presidential favorite. John McCain held no ideological allure, and Kmiec, like many Romneyites (and Romney himself), felt a lingering resentment toward him. He believed that McCain had resorted to

BEAST BRUTALITY

The caption read,
"He and she standing quietly next to a dog."

The prompt queen sat with her crown on,
The insets between each Gothic arch providing a measure

Of what can be
Done with architecture.

She said, "We built it long ago.
And then we knocked it down."

And then she looked away.
"And then we looked away."

—Mary Jo Bang

Swift Boat tactics in misrepresenting Romney's position on Iraq. "Let me put this as kindly as I can," he says. "Senator McCain was not the most generous of heart, or honest of disposition, toward his primary opponents. I always want to concede his integrity, because I can't ever envision myself surviving a P.O.W. experience of the kind that he survived, and I admire those years of his life—but that admirable contribution to American history was greatly dimmed by seeing him up close and personal in the primaries."

Kmiec found himself reflecting on Barack Obama, and his Call to Renewal speech. "His insights there were not only significantly different from the Democrats of the past," Kmiec says, "but they were significantly better than either the Democrats or the Republicans of the past, in the sense that he argued that religion shouldn't be a wedge issue, and that we should stop demonizing each other on that basis. Religion necessarily is a source of morality, and morality is necessarily the place where we draw laws from. That in itself, to have acknowledged that, was a key sales point for me, because even the Supreme Court gets itself tangled on that proposition."

A week after Romney withdrew from the race, Kmiec wrote about his Obama reflections in an article for the online magazine *Slate*, which bore the provocative title "Reaganites for Obama?" Kmiec wrote that Obama's politics of hope reminded him of Reagan's sunny optimism, and he mused that, while abortion was still of paramount importance to Catholics, years of Republican rule had not significantly reduced its occurrence. "Beyond life issues, an audaciously hope-filled Democrat like Obama is a Catholic natural," he wrote.

Kmiec's conservative Catholic friends were aghast, and several of them, including Deal Hudson, rebuked him in Catholic publications, some even suggesting that he was motivated by ambition. Kmiec thought the response heavy-handed, and observed that if this was an example of Republican religious outreach, then John McCain's campaign was in trouble. "It was a brick through the window with a note attached, and the note said, 'Obey, or else,' " he told me. "I never quite figured out what the 'or else' was. I'm a tenured old professor not looking to go anywhere. And I live in Malibu. What is it they're going to dangle in front of me?"

Shortly after his *Slate* article appeared, Kmiec received a call from a young woman working in the Obama campaign, a friend of Keenan Kmiec (himself now an Obama supporter) who had clerked with him at the Supreme Court. She asked if Kmiec would consider supporting Obama more formally. In that and other conversations with the Obama camp, Kmiec expressed his admiration for the candidate but also his reservations about Obama's position on abortion. Obama was such a staunch supporter of abortion rights that he received NARAL's endorsement over Hillary Clinton, and, at an event for Planned Parenthood, he'd promised that "the first thing I'd do as President is sign the Freedom of Choice Act"—which would nullify most state restrictions on abortion. Kmiec was assured that Obama's position on abortion was more nuanced than it seemed, and that, although Obama was pro-choice, he was not pro-abortion.

Kmiec eventually got an opportunity to air his doubts to Obama himself, at a Chicago meeting with a select group of religious figures. (Among them was the evangelist Franklin Graham, who asked Obama, "Do you believe that Jesus Christ is *the* way to God, or merely a way?" Obama responded, "Jesus is the only way for me," and Graham left the meeting impressed.) "I even raised the objection to just talking about abortion as a vehicle for gender equality," Kmiec recalls. "I said, 'You know, this is not language that a Catholic will accept, and I don't accept it. You don't need to use it, if I understand your position correctly. So tell me your position.' And out of that I got an answer that said, 'I would never counsel my daughters to have an abortion. I view it as a profoundly moral decision. It is my purpose to discourage the practice. But it is also my belief that there's no other actor on earth than the mother who can address this question. And to be pro-choice means that you contemplate that the choice can be the choice in favor of life.' That suggests to me that he's got the mental disposition to understand, at least from the Catholic perspective, how abortion is more a tragedy than a method of equality."

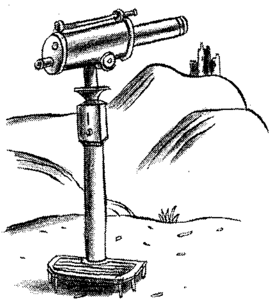
Hudson told me that he was astonished by Kmiec's abrupt shift. "Has Doug Kmiec never met a charming politician before?" he asked. He said that Kmiec seems to have adopted the liberal-Catholic construct of "a consistent ethic of life," contextualizing abortion in a spectrum of other Catholic issues. "It sounds like my friend Doug has just completely gone over to the other side," Hudson said.

"I want to say back to Deal, 'We're worshipping at different churches, then,' " Kmiec responded. "The church I have attended since my mother walked me down the block to St. Pascal's, in Chicago, was one that had taught this social gospel. . . . I would say back to

Deal, 'Yes, I'm in the Federalist Society, and, yes, I believe in private property and federalism and the separation of powers and all that. But these other beliefs I find fully compatible.' "

Kmiec endorsed Obama on March 23rd—Easter Sunday, his conservative friends noted. A few weeks later, while attending a meeting of Legatus, a Catholic business leaders' association founded by the conservative philanthropist Tom Monaghan, Kmiec attended Mass with his colleagues. The priest declined to serve him Communion.

It remains to be seen whether Kmiec is an anomaly or if he represents a broader willingness by Christian conservatives to reconsider their Republican fealty. Democratic Catholic outreach since 2004 has been earnest, perhaps most usefully in the recruitment of candidates who adhere to the Church's orthodoxy, rather than the Party's, on such matters as abortion. The Party hurt itself badly with Catholics at the 1992 Convention, in New York, when the governor of Pennsylvania, Bob Casey, was denied a speaking role because of his outspoken pro-life views. After the Party's 2004 losses, Casey's son, Bob Casey, Jr., was recruited for a Senate run, despite the objections voiced by pro-choice activists. Casey defeated the religious-right stalwart Rick Santorum, and was among the speakers at the Democratic Convention last week. Doug Kmiec participated in a panel on Thursday, as part of a series of Faith Caucus meetings, a first for Democrats. The Convention had opened with an interfaith gathering on Sunday, featuring remarks from Colorado's governor, Bill Ritter—a Catholic Democrat, with orthodox views. Among the reasons for Obama's selection of Senator Joe Biden as his running mate, the most compelling may have been the fact that Biden is a practicing Catholic. (It may be an indication of Biden's potential in this regard that a Web site called Catholics Against Joe Biden appeared within hours of the selection.)



Obama's pro-choice-but-against-abortion formulation has been taken up by the Party, and is reflected in the Democratic platform. This apparent softening on the abortion issue, however rhetorical, has allowed for a resurgence of the "consistent ethic of life" construct, now being aggressively proposed by Catholic liberals as the proper Catholic approach to issues.

John McCain's religious-outreach effort has been attenuated at best, perhaps reflecting the candidate's pronounced ambivalence toward the religious right, and the insistent agenda of cultural conservatives in general. McCain admitted as much in July, when George Stephanopoulos, of ABC, asked him about his position on gay adoption. He doesn't support it, McCain said, but he added, "It's not the reason why I'm running for President of the United States."

Independents and moderates may admire that attitude, but it is a cold bath to cause-driven activists, who, in another time, would have been able to count upon harmonizing their efforts with those of the national Republican campaign. Activists in California, anticipating a ruling by the state Supreme Court that legalized same-sex marriage, launched a drive to put an initiative on the ballot in November that would amend the state's constitution to ban gay marriage. The proposal prompted an extensive support effort—forty-day fasts, prayer marathons, and the like—among Church leaders in California and the two other states that have similar measures, culminating in a daylong stadium rally on the weekend before Election Day. "There has been no dialogue with the McCain campaign at all," says Jim Garlow, the pastor of the Skyline Church, in suburban San Diego, who is one of the drive's organizers. "If I were Senator McCain, I would do everything I could to identify with this issue. I don't know that he will. I have no idea what his campaign is about. At this point, he seems quite low-key on these types of things."

On the evangelical right, there is a pronounced sense that the movement, as a political force, is adrift. This is, in part, the result of a vacuum of leadership, as the movement faces its first election season in a generation without Jerry Falwell on the scene. Younger evangelicals, put off by the image of the Christian right created by Falwell and Pat Robertson, are fiercely pro-life but seem less inclined than their elders to commit themselves to Republican Party politics. Karl Rove has suggested that the movement, though still central to the Republican coalition, may have reached a plateau. "There were a lot of people in 2004 who were motivated to participate in the process because of what they felt to be a personal connection between themselves and President Bush, in part because of the faith link," Rove told me. "I don't think they feel that with either candidate this time around. And one thing we know about people of faith, particularly Protestant evangelicals, is that they tend to flow in and out of the system. Evangelicals, certain elements of them, have a very strong tradition of believing that they need to withdraw from the public life of the country."

George Bush, who was his own best religious-outreach operative, might have been able to fill the vacuum and rally the faith-directed base, and Bush nostalgia is already showing itself among some on the religious right. "George Bush knew how to walk into a room of evangelicals and in five minutes send all the right signals," Albert Mohler, the president of the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, in Louisville, Kentucky, told me. "He almost could have left the room having accomplished in five minutes all that he wanted to accomplish. And that is not the case with John McCain. John McCain can walk into the room and in five minutes have people more puzzled about who he is than they were before he came in."

The signals that McCain does send, especially to the young, are not necessarily helpful to his cause. "You know, a part of it is McCain the man," Mohler says. "A part of it is McCain the candidate. And a part of it is just . . . his age. This is a man who wore a cardigan sweater when he was campaigning in Florida. I mean, I grew up in Florida, and that's sending a signal for sure."

It may be that the greatest motivator for politically conservative Christians is the prospect of a Barack Obama Administration. By midsummer, James Dobson, of Focus on the Family, had reconsidered his vow never to support McCain. On his radio broadcast, with Mohler as his guest, Dobson reiterated McCain's many faults but allowed that even McCain was better than Obama—whom Mohler characterized as "the most liberal candidate, I think, to gain a party nomination probably in the history of this country." Dobson proceeded to offer the most tepid semi-endorsement possible. "I have considered the fact that elections always involve imperfect candidates," he said. "There are no perfect human beings. And you always have to choose between two flawed individuals; that's the way we are all made. So it comes down to this—and I never thought I would hear myself saying this, but it's where I am—that, while I am not endorsing Senator John McCain, the possibility is there that I might. And that's all I can say at this time."

A nose-holding base does not often deliver election victories, but few evangelicals could imagine what McCain might say or do, with any degree of authenticity, that could excite the base. The prospect of McCain's appearance with Barack Obama at Pastor Rick Warren's Saddleback Church, on August 16th, made many evangelicals cringe. Mohler was among those who expected the worst from what seemed, given Warren's disdain for sharp partisanship, a venue perfectly tailored to Obama's strengths. But McCain surprised. For many evangelicals, the event turned on the question, posed by Warren to both candidates separately, "At what point does a baby get human rights, in your view?" Obama's response, characteristically nuanced, came across as a dodge. "Well," he began, "I think that, whether you're looking at it from a theological perspective or a scientific perspective, answering that question with specificity, you know, is above my pay grade." Asked the same question, McCain didn't hesitate. "At the moment of conception," he said, to the loud approval of the congregation.

"I think it was a good start," said Rove, who believes that McCain still needs to reveal more to the public about his personal faith. On Albert Mohler's radio show two days later, the verdict on the event was less tentative. "John McCain just blew Obama right straight out of the water" was one comment from a typical caller. "Politics has a way of making strange bedfellows," Ralph Reed says. "The irony is that McCain has a chance to win as large a percentage of the evangelical vote as Bush did in 2000, and maybe even 2004, which no one would have predicted six months ago." Shortly afterward, of course, McCain thrilled his conservative base further with the selection of the fervently Christian Governor Sarah Palin, of Alaska, as his Vice-Presidential nominee. ("A home run," Reed declared to the *Times*, and Dobson called the choice "outstanding.")

The Saddleback event illuminated Obama's greatest liability for faith-based voters: his resolute support for abortion rights. Many, including Doug Kmiec, winced when Obama said, at a town-hall meeting last spring, that he supported sex education because he didn't want his daughters "punished with a baby." The week after the Saddleback event, conservative commentators advanced the theme that Obama supported infanticide, as evidenced by his opposition to a 2003 bill in the Illinois legislature requiring medical personnel to attempt to sustain the lives of babies that survive abortion procedures. Obama's various explanations—that the bill threatened the rights established by Roe v. Wade; that his opposition was largely procedural—did not stand up well to scrutiny, and even Doug Kmiec admitted to having doubts.

"Here is a bit of an Achilles' heel," Kmiec says. "Senator Obama the candidate, as many have observed, is different from Senator Obama the legislator. That's the unanswered question about the Senator. And it's a question that does require a leap of faith on my part, and on the part of anyone who comes to him from perspectives like my own."

Kmiec has decided that he is willing to take that leap. Obama has no reason to expect a mass exodus of religious conservatives from the Republican ranks, but if he can persuade even a portion of those voters who were swayed to Bush's side by the Rove religious machine, it could be enough.

In Rove's view, Obama has already begun to transform the faith-unfriendly Democratic image that made the Republicans' 2000 and 2004 strategies possible.

"The overt hostility of some elements of the Democratic Party is being usefully scrubbed away by Obama," Rove says. "And, for that, everybody in America ought to be thankful." ♦

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Peter J. Boyer takes readers' questions.

THE NEW YORKER, NOV. 12, 1927

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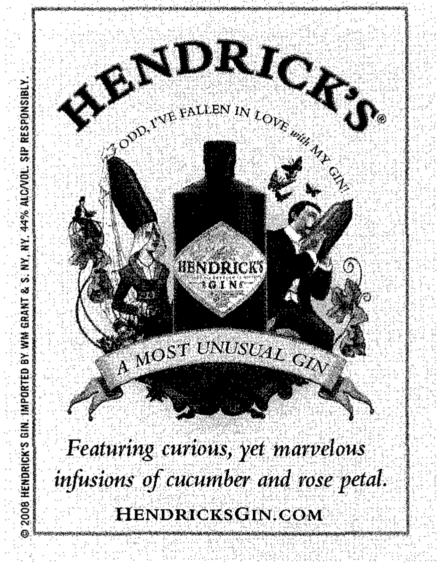

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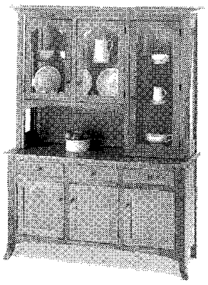

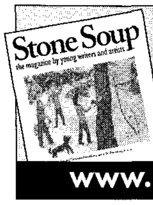

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SHOUTS & MURMURS

A MASS E-MAIL

BY AMY OZOLS

Dear All:

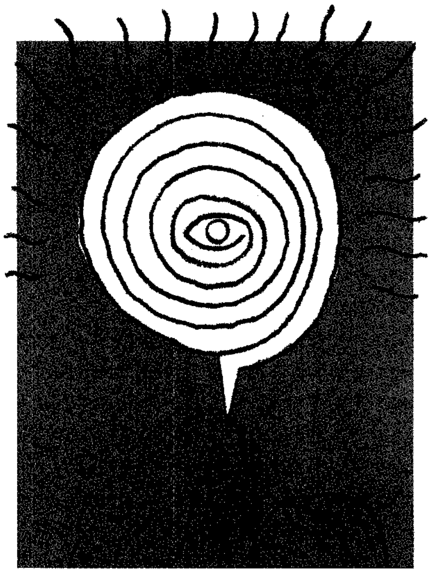
Before I begin, I'd like to apologize for sending a mass e-mail.

I'm writing because I've lost my cell phone, and I'd really appreciate it if each of you could reply to this message with your phone number, home address, and any other pertinent information I might need to get in touch with you. I kept all that information in the cell phone that I lost. I never wrote it down on a piece of paper or in a book, or backed it up on a computer, because cell phones are historically quite dependable, and not prone to getting lost or stolen—at least, not where I come from, a place where there is neither crime nor personal failure. I come from Iceland.

I'd also appreciate it if you could send me your e-mail address. I already have your e-mail address, which I'm using to send the e-mail you're currently reading, but I plan to delete it from my memory after I've finished typing, because I really prefer to keep this sort of thing in my cell phone. I find that it frees up my "brain space" for other important things, like meditation and prayer and comparing and contrasting the prices and features of various cell phones.

If it's not too much trouble, I'd also like to know your birthday, preferably with the year included. This is so I can send you one of those electronic birthday cards. I'll send it to your e-mail address, which I plan to enter into my future cell phone before subsequently losing it in a public rest room. So, actually, what would be really helpful is if you could let me know your birthday, then wait three weeks, then send me your e-mail address, so that I can store it in my two-phones-in-the-future phone for use on your next birthday. This probably seems like a lot of work, but I want to assure you that it will be well worth it, because your electronic birthday card will feature music, and dancing cartoon animals, and a not insignificant amount of whimsy. It won't be one of those tacky electronic birthday cards, where there's a half-naked person holding a cupcake or an elderly person farting on Father Time.

I assume that it goes without saying that I'll also need your bank-account numbers, and any PIN or routing numbers associated with those accounts. Of course, I will also need your Social Security number. You have correctly guessed that this is for the purpose of large-scale identity theft.



LAURENT CILLUFFO

Finally, please send me your pets. Not pictures of your pets. Your actual pets.

In closing, I'd like to reiterate how sorry I am for sending a mass e-mail. I wish I could have contacted each of you in person—it's been waaaay too long since most of us have hung out! But, as I may have already mentioned, I plan to lose my new cell phone almost immediately after I buy it, so I really look forward to contacting each of you individually when that happens. Even though I have never met any of you.

Very sincerely yours,
The author of this e-mail

*Sent from my iPhone. ♦

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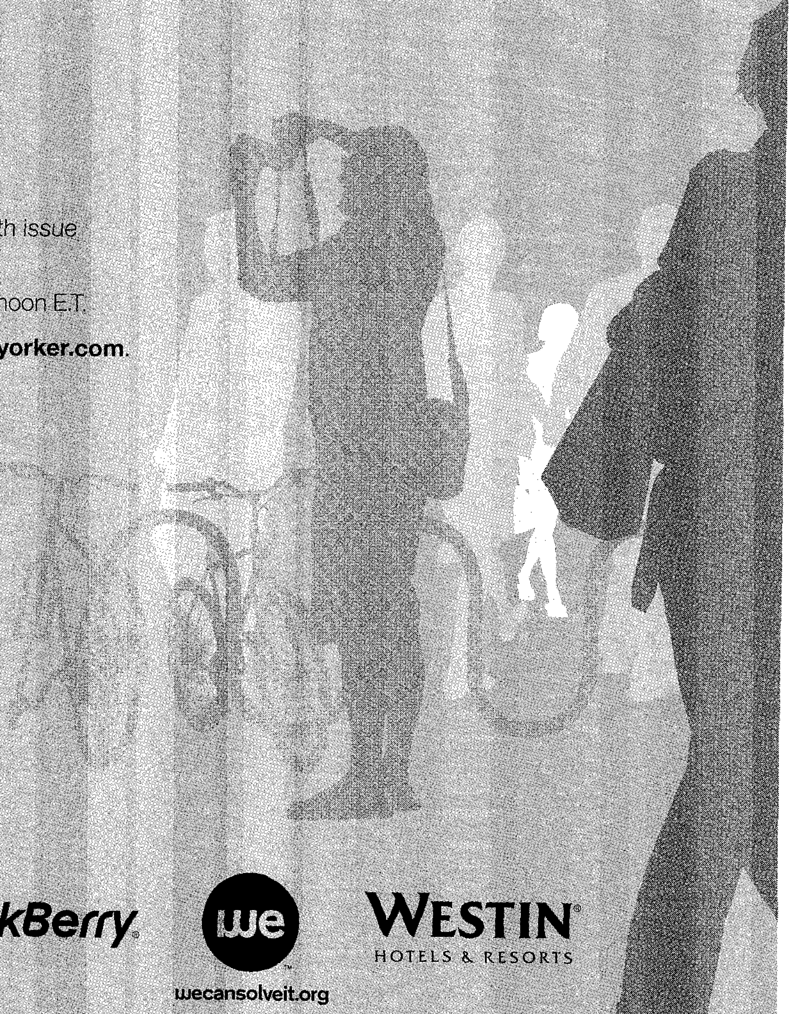


A REPORTER AT LARGE

THE GENERAL'S DILEMMA

David Petraeus, the pressures of politics, and the road out of Iraq.

BY STEVE COLL

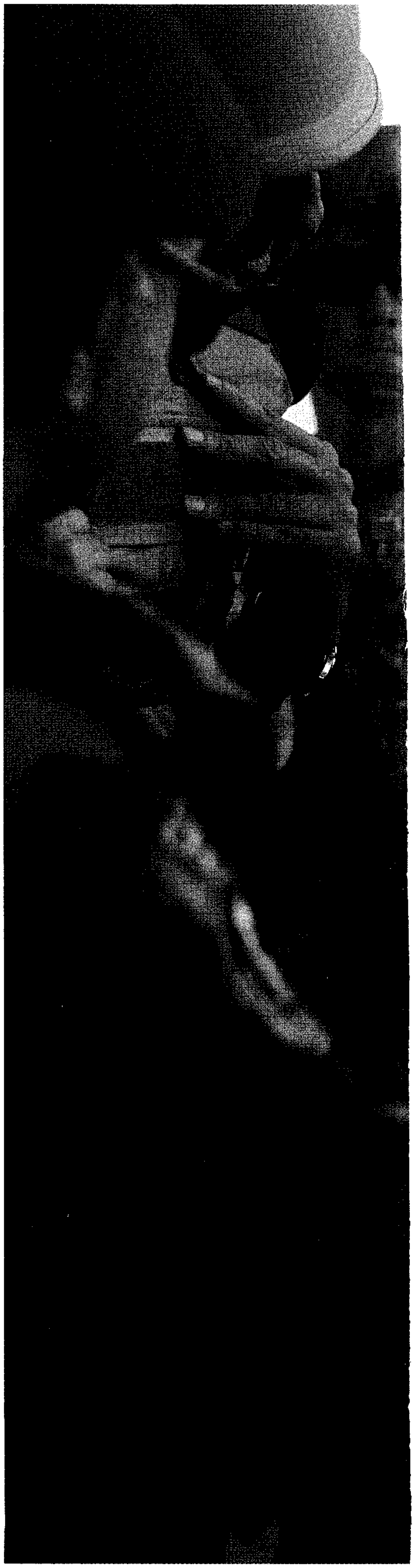
Early in 2007, when David Petraeus became Commanding General of United States and international forces in Iraq, he had in mind a strategy to manage the political pressures he would face because of the unpopularity of the war, then four years old, and of its author, George W. Bush. He pledged to be responsive to "both ends of Pennsylvania Avenue"—to his Commander-in-Chief in the White House, of course, but also to antiwar Democrats on Capitol Hill. Petraeus earned a doctoral degree at Princeton University in 1987; the title of his dissertation was "The American Military and the Lessons of Vietnam." In thinking about how to cope with political divisions in the United States over Iraq, he was influenced, he told me recently, by Samuel Huntington's 1957 book "The Soldier and the State," which argues that civilian control over the military can best be achieved when uniformed officers regard themselves as impartial professionals. Petraeus is registered to vote as a Republican in New Hampshire—he once described himself to a friend as a northeastern Republican, in the tradition of Nelson Rockefeller—but he said that around 2002, after he became a two-star general, he stopped voting. As he departed for Baghdad, to oversee a "surge" deployment of additional American troops to Iraq, he sought, as he recalled it, "to try to avoid being pulled in one direction or another, to be in a sense used by one side or the other." He added, "That's very hard to do, because you become at some point sort of the face of the war, the face of the surge. So be it. You just have to deal with that."

On September 10, 2007, Petraeus awoke at his stateside home at Fort Meyer, Virginia, which is on a hill above Arlington Cemetery. The General went for a morning run and tried "to get my game face on," as he recalled it. He was scheduled to appear before Congress that day to offer the first comprehensive assessment of whether his leadership had yet fostered any progress in Iraq. Petraeus regarded these hearings, he remembered, as "the oral exam of one's life." Partisan debate over the war had grown even more intense since his appointment; the Bush Administration, for its part, had entered its late Karl Rove period, characterized by rococo flourishes—the White House had insured, for example, that Petraeus's first critical testimony about the surge would coincide with the anniversary of the terror attacks of September 11, 2001.

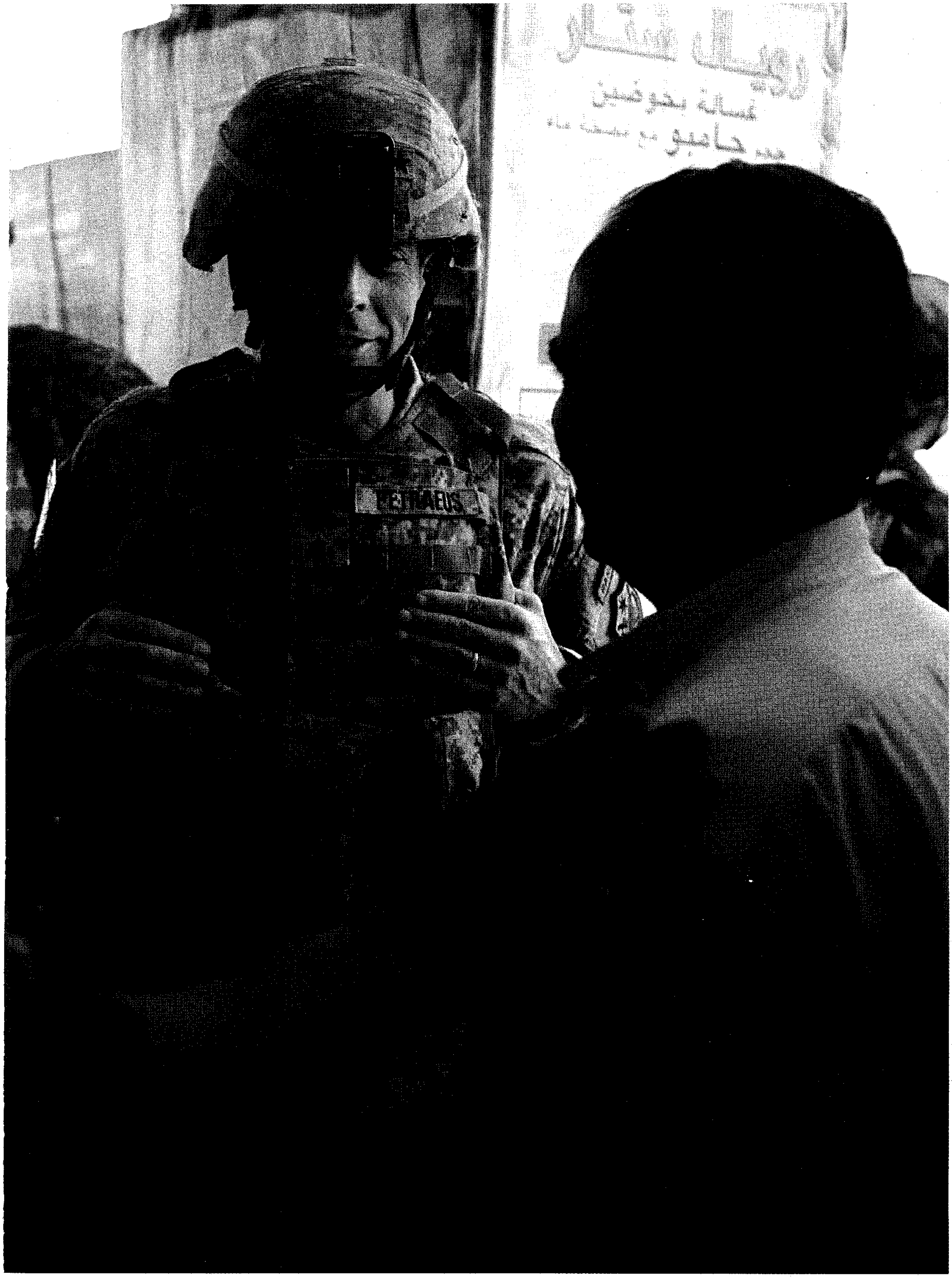
After his workout, Petraeus donned a dress uniform bearing nine rows of ribbons. Someone called his attention to a full-page advertisement that had been placed in that morning's *Times* by MoveOn, the liberal activist group. The ad featured the General's photograph above the headline "GENERAL PETRAEUS OR GENERAL BETRAY US?" It accused him of "cooking the books" for the Bush White House. The Iraq conflict was "unwinnable," the advertisement argued; it also claimed that some of Petraeus's past accounts of progress there had been "at war with the facts."

When we met recently in Iraq, I asked Petraeus if that ad in the *Times* had marked the low point of his personal experience in this command. It had not, he said; coping with the deaths of soldiers had been considerably more difficult. He added, however, that he rarely feels stress at all, an assertion supported by his appearance: at the age of fifty-five, he has a lightly lined face and chestnut hair that is barely marked by gray. When he does experience an occasional spike in his blood pressure, he said, it is usually caused by an unexpected event, particularly on the battlefield. By contrast, in Washington, he remarked, referring to the city's culture of political ambush, "you know what's coming."

When the General arrived on Capitol Hill to testify that September day, some Democrats poured their frustrations out on him, as if he had been the war's



Petraeus tours a market in Yusufiya, a town nea

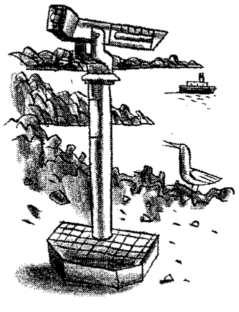


aghdad. "The idea is to stay away from the whole optimism-pessimism thing," he says. Photograph by Franco Pagetti.

creator. "How many more names will be added to the wall before we admit it is time to leave?" Representative Robert Wexler, of Florida, demanded at the first of three hearings before House and Senate committees. "How many more names, General?"

Bright lights illuminated the cavernous room, and the elevated faces of congressmen produced a disorienting sensation, Petraeus remembered. "It becomes an out-of-body experience very, very quickly," he said. "You can start to feel yourself sort of looking down at this guy who's reading this statement or answering questions. You have to actually work very hard to stay focussed. . . . They don't have comfortable chairs. You can't adjust the height. You have to sit on the edge of them. Actually, I really had back pain, which I don't normally have, just from sitting there for ten hours that first day. So it was just something to be endured, candidly."

Victory Base Complex, the headquarters of Multi-National Force-Iraq, lies to the west of Baghdad on an eroded wasteland crossed by marshy canals. It is a vast military-industrial park, resembling a northern New Jersey superfund site. Fuel and dust scent the air; helicopters thump overhead. About fifty thousand people inhabit Victory, making it one of the largest of sixty-one American bases in Iraq. (There are also about two hundred and fifty smaller American outposts and facilities in the country.) Victory's main dining hall, the Oasis, is the size of an airplane hangar; it is organized on a sports theme, with separate salons for fans of the National Football League and Major League Baseball.



General Petraeus commands the war from a lakeside palace built by Saddam Hussein in 1992. Modular office cubicles now fill its five dozen marble-floored bedrooms. The General occupies a high-ceilinged room furnished with a mahogany desk and conference table, video screens, flags, and wall-mounted maps. (He also maintains a smaller office at the U.S. Embassy in the International Zone, formerly known as the Green Zone, in central Baghdad.) When I visited him in late July, Petraeus seemed reflective, open, and at times even wistful about the approaching end of his third Iraq tour.

The challenges of civil-military relations that he must manage these days are considerably less intense than they were a year ago, principally owing to the decline of violence in Iraq under his command. Iraq today is a far from stable or normal country: about two million refugees remain outside its borders; nearly three million remain displaced within the country; and car bombs periodically kill and maim civilians. Yet it is a much more peaceful place than it was last summer. The number of daily attacks recorded by the U.S. military has fallen from a peak of about a hundred and eighty in June, 2007, to about twenty in early August of this year. Violent deaths of Iraqi civilians, while difficult to measure, have also dropped steeply, although the figure remains high: about five hundred per month, at a conservative estimate. Fatalities among U.S. military personnel have declined from a hundred and twenty-six in May, 2007, to just thirteen this past July, the lowest total of any month since the war began, in March, 2003.

The surge was designed to change Iraqi politics by providing the security needed to induce a national reconciliation; this has not occurred, although there has been progress of a tentative nature. In the United States, however, the surge has had more obvious political effects. The Iraq war is no longer the most important issue on the minds of voters (the economy is), and election-year debate about the war, formerly an argument about strategic failure, now must also account for provisional successes.

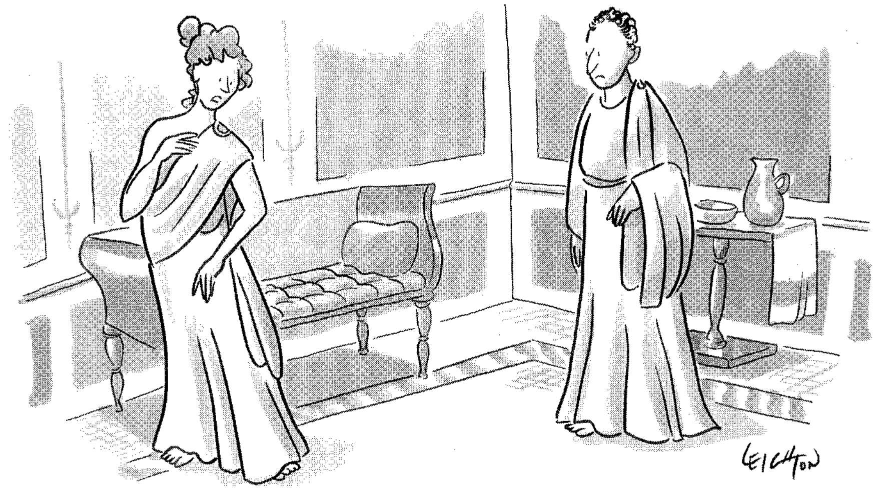
Indeed, because of the reductions in Iraq's violence, General Petraeus has been cast in the Presidential campaign's emerging narrative as a sort of Mesopotamian oracle, one that must be consulted or honored by the two remaining candidates. In July, Senator Barack Obama went to Iraq and saw the General; he was rewarded, courtesy of Petraeus's energetic press aides, with an iconic photograph, printed in many dozens of newspapers, which showed the Senator aboard a command helicopter, smiling confidently at the General's side. A few weeks later, Senator John McCain, while speaking at a nationally televised forum hosted by the evangelist Rick Warren, invoked Petraeus as one of the three wisest people he knew; McCain called the General "one of the great military leaders in American history." Afterward, on the campaign trail, the Republican Senator attacked Obama for not being as staunch an acolyte of Petraeus as McCain has been.

Within the Army itself, as the field commander who has presided over the only sustained drop in Iraq's death toll since the war began, Petraeus has become the most influential general of his era. Recently, the Army Secretary asked him to chair a panel to select about two per cent of the Army's full colonels for promotion to brigadier or one-star general; through this assignment, Petraeus helped to identify the men and women who will lead the institution for the next decade or more. The National Defense Strategy paper issued by Secretary of Defense Robert Gates this summer bears the imprint of Petraeus's ideas about military doctrine, particularly his belief that the Army must organize itself to be as competent at stabilizing impoverished countries as it is at high-intensity combat. Beginning in mid-September, as the leader of CENTCOM—Central Command—the General will oversee all U.S. military forces between Pakistan and Egypt and attempt to apply lessons from his Iraq campaign to the intensifying war in Afghanistan.

Petraeus's influence has spread within the Pentagon even as some military officers continue to debate exactly why violence in Iraq has declined, how the role of the surge should be interpreted, and how its strategic costs should be assessed. This internal discourse is not widely publicized; it takes place in privately circulated white papers and in specialty periodicals such as *Small Wars Journal.* One of its provocateurs is Colonel Gian Gentile, a historian at West Point, who has served two tours in Iraq, most recently in 2006, as a cavalry squadron commander in Baghdad; he argues that Petraeus's command has had only a marginal effect on events, and that the recent fall-off in violence has been due mostly to local causes, such as a decision by Sunni tribes to turn against Al Qaeda, which began before the added deployments. "If we convince ourselves that it was the surge that was the primary cause for the lowering of violence, that may convince us that we can tackle another problem like Iraq in the future and have the same results," Gentile told me. "It pushes us into a sort of dogmatic view of ourselves.”

Gentile’s view represents a minority dissent within the Army, but it reflects the persistence of debate about the war’s implications among the military professionals who have borne its burdens. The surge is a particularly complex subject; the term is not easy to define, because the scope of Petraeus’s command has encompassed much more than the deployment of additional American combat troops, as ordered by Bush. These days, when “the surge” is employed as a shorthand label, it is usually intended to refer also to the application of new battlefield tactics by Petraeus and his commanders, and to the political work carried out by the General and Ambassador Ryan Crocker during 2007 and 2008. (Crocker arrived in Iraq shortly after Petraeus, in early 2007, and they have worked together closely.) By that broader definition, many independent analysts and, by now, many Democrats, including Obama, credit Petraeus and the surge for the relative quiet in Iraq. The General’s command has certainly benefitted from unplanned events—the turn by Sunni tribes, above all. And yet “it was Petraeus who had the wit to seize on that and exploit it,” Toby Dodge, a British political scientist who has occasionally advised the General, said.

A separate question, Dodge noted, is how durable the ceasefires and political accommodations fashioned by the surge will prove to be. Arrangements Petraeus has made with Iraq’s Sunni tribes, for example, have clearly helped to reduce violence, and thus have proved to be a gamble worth taking, Dodge said, and yet “that’s not bringing the state into people’s lives—that’s recognizing powerful actors on the ground and giving them autonomy.” Some American skeptics of Petraeus’s achievements go further: they argue that the General’s reliance on local deals (sometimes referred to as a “bottom-up” approach) may yet exacerbate the country’s instability. Unless the United States can craft a much more successful effort, reinforced by international diplomacy, to strengthen Iraq’s central government, “we’re midwifing the dissolution of the country,” Steven Simon, a senior director at the National Security Council during the Clinton Administration, said. He continued, “There are two things that every successful state in the Middle East has had to do to insure its viability. One is to stamp out warlordism, and the other is to suppress tribalism. Where that has not happened, you find unsuccessful states, like Yemen, for example—and now Iraq. . . . We’re creating dependencies in a decentralized state that will be at risk when we leave.”



“Does this toga make my gluteus look maximus?”

Simon’s argument points to a tenet of Petraeus’s command philosophy, one that might be called constructive opportunism. “One of the keys with counter-insurgency is that every province is a unique case,” Petraeus told me. “What you’re trying to figure out is what works—right here, right now.” In defense of his approach in Iraq, the General and his staff argue, essentially, that they inherited a war of many fronts and managed to stop it, or at least pause it—an achievement that they regard as necessary and remarkable but also insufficient. Indeed, how sturdy Iraq’s patchwork calm will prove to be, and how it might best be reinforced, in the context of America’s broader national-security and economic interests, are questions that await the next President—as well as Petraeus, serving as that President’s commander of United States forces in the Middle East.

Petraeus is not a physically imposing man; he is five feet nine inches tall, and he possesses the slender physique of a fitness enthusiast. Years ago, he swept top honors at Ranger School, one of the military’s most difficult endurance tests, and he is still known within the Army as a fiercely competitive runner and performer of one-armed pushups. When victorious, he is not always a paragon of gracious rectitude: “You can write that off on your income tax as education” is one of his trash-talking lines. His upper body tilts slightly as a result of two traumatic non-combat injuries. In 1991, a soldier under his command accidentally fired a rifle; the bullet struck Petraeus in the chest and opened a bleeding wound. (The thoracic surgeon who saved him at a Tennessee hospital was Bill Frist, later the Senate Majority Leader.) Eight years ago, Petraeus’s parachute failed to open on a training jump; he plummeted sixty feet, smashing his pelvis. None of this has discouraged him from continuing to run and exercise aggressively, although recently, according to several of his aides, he has toned down his competitive displays. As Command Sergeant Major Marvin Hill, who has twice served as Petraeus’s highest-ranking noncommissioned officer, put it, “The self-actualization box has been checked.”

The General leads the Iraq war in the style of a corporate chief executive, one influenced by the recent managerial preference for “flatness,” or horizontal forms of communication. He told me that as Commanding General he believes he should not only direct battlefield action but also disseminate a few easy-to-grasp concepts about the war’s prosecution, which subordinate officers can then interpret on their own. He does this by continually re-stating what is known as “the commander’s intent,” in letters to the troops, in e-mails, in PowerPoint and storyboard briefings, on visits to the field, and in commentary at his daily morning meeting with senior commanders—the Battlefield Update Assessment, or BUA, referred to by all who participate as "the boo-uh."

Petraeus is a professional briefer, and with a PowerPoint slide before him he will slip into a salesman's rapid-fire patter. He illustrates his remarks with a laser pointer; he will swirl a bright dot of emerald light around a particular sentence fragment until a listener risks succumbing to hypnosis. Petraeus and his staff will discuss at length the shading of colors on a slide, or the direction of arrows depicting causality. When I asked, in a skeptical tone, about this passionate use of PowerPoint, the General responded in the staccato of the medium: "It's how you communicate big ideas—to communicate them effectively."

The underlying text from which Petraeus proselytizes these days is a classified document, totalling several hundred pages, called the Joint Campaign Plan, written by Petraeus and Crocker. In essence, it is the Iraq war plan, although it prescribes many activities other than war. Petraeus began rewriting the plan during the first days of his command; Bush formally approved the current version in November, 2007. It is divided into four main "lines of operation"—security, politics, diplomacy, and economics—and it lays out the approaches to counter-insurgency that Petraeus favors. These include a strong emphasis on keeping civilians safe, in order to isolate violent groups and create conditions for delivery of better government services; to accomplish this, Petraeus has pushed U.S. and Iraqi soldiers into Baghdad's neighborhoods. The plan's ultimate goal is to move all U.S. forces from direct combat to a more removed posture of "overwatch," wherein the United States would provide logistical, intelligence, and air support to Iraq's Army and national police.

More than any single document, Petraeus's Joint Campaign Plan is the framework for Iraq policy which America's next President will inherit. In many ways, the document is a compendium of the intellectual history of the surge—a history, like Petraeus's own rise within the Army, that begins with the reckonings of Vietnam.

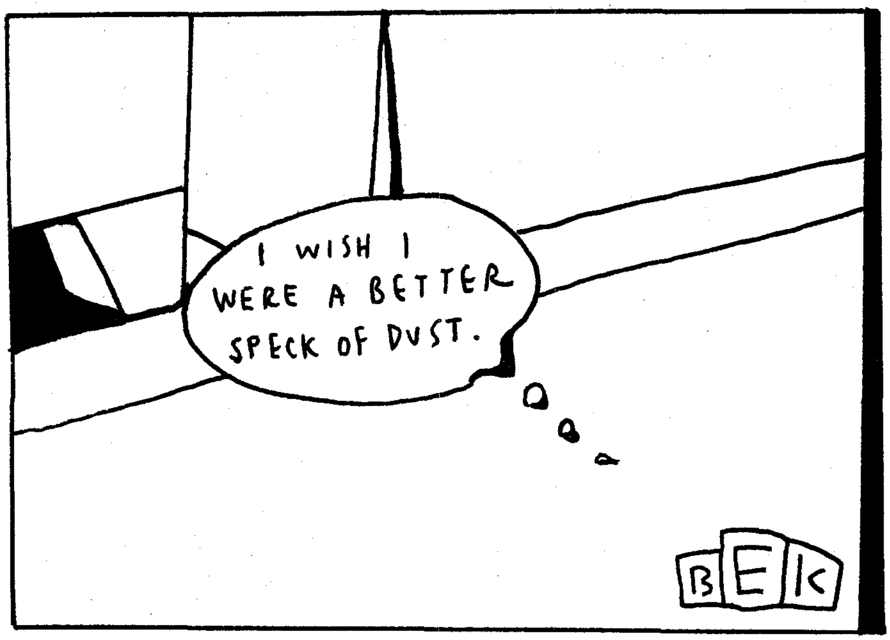
Petraeus matriculated at West Point in 1970. He excelled there, not least in his social life; he dated and later married the superintendent's daughter. "Obviously," recalled Conrad Crane, a classmate who now teaches military history at the Army War College, this "would give him a certain reputation. But he was very competent, very capable, not egotistical."

It was not a particularly uplifting time at West Point. The dropout rate in Petraeus's class ran high; a failing war shadowed the Army and the cadets who would enter it. "We were basically watching Vietnam collapse on television," Crane recalled. "It was hard to forget."

When I asked Petraeus, one recent morning in Baghdad, what impact Vietnam had on him as a cadet and a young officer, he replied that it "was not that significant, believe it or not." He would read the *Times* each morning, he explained, and he would attend occasional football games at civilian universities whose campuses were engulfed by antiwar protests. Debates about gender and race "were swirling around in America at the time, and that, I guess, caused all Americans to question authority. . . . We weren't immune." And yet he enjoyed a relatively cloistered existence, he said.

Petraeus attended an airborne school in France after graduation and consorted there with French paratroopers who had fought in Vietnam during the nineteen-fifties. Intrigued, he began to read. It was through books that he entered into Vietnam in depth. He read the military historian Bernard Fall's accounts of French failure during the fifties, "Hell in a Very Small Place" and "A Street Without Joy." He read, too, the work of American journalists, such as "The Best and the Brightest," David Halberstam's portrait of the arrogance of the war's overseers in Washington; and Neil Sheehan's account of an ambitious American specialist in counter-insurgency, John Paul Vann (part of which ran in this magazine). That book, "A Bright Shining Lie," Petraeus recalled, "seemed to put a sort of punctuation mark on the whole scholarship."

By the mid-nineteen-eighties, Petraeus had become one of a small circle of post-Vietnam military officers who had developed an interest in counter-insurgency doctrine. At the time, this was a neglected subject within the Army. In the late Cold War period, and during the nineteen-nineties, the Army embraced what became known as the Powell Doctrine, which emphasized the decisive use of overwhelming force in conventional wars, as well as the enunciation of clear exit strategies for U.S. troops. Powell's cohort of officers had served in Vietnam and had known the war's entrapments firsthand; their doctrinal emphasis on short, popular, winnable wars was designed to prevent the recurrence of such a catastrophe. But Petraeus and those around him believed "deep in their bones that we don't get to choose what kind of wars we fight," John Nagl, a 1988 West Point graduate and Rhodes Scholar who became part of Petraeus's circle, said. They felt that it was therefore es-


I WISH I WERE A BETTER SPECK OF DUST.
BEK

sential to vanquish Vietnam's ghosts and learn to wage irregular war successfully.

These officers developed a particular interest in the generalship of Creighton Abrams, who assumed command of U.S. forces in Vietnam in 1968, after William Westmoreland. Westmoreland had failed in his campaign to destroy the Vietcong through a war of attrition that emphasized devastating firepower. Abrams tried a more supple approach, stressing population security and improved governance. The General's 1969 campaign plan for Vietnam, titled "One War," anticipated the Joint Campaign Plan that Petraeus would write in Iraq.

At Princeton, in 1987, Petraeus finished a three-hundred-and-twenty-eight-page dissertation on what he described as "the impact of Vietnam on America's senior military with respect to their most important task—advising the nation's leadership on the use of American military forces in potential combat situations." Reviewing geopolitical crises after the fall of Saigon, Petraeus observed a pattern of "military caution" in the United States caused by Vietnam's "chastening effect." He also described in disapproving tones the Army's reduction of counter-insurgency training. The "world situation" would determine how long this "Vietnam legacy" would endure, he concluded; among the trends that might force the Army to return to the challenge of irregular warfare, Petraeus forecast, was "the rise of terrorism."

The General arrived in Iraq for the first time in March, 2003, as the invasion began, in command of the 101st Airborne Division, one of three divisions assigned to the initial drive toward Baghdad. On the afternoon of March 26th, just six days into the war, he stood on the outskirts of Najaf with Rick Atkinson, the journalist and military historian, and observed combat involving irregular Iraqi fedayeen forces. "Tell me how this ends," he remarked to Atkinson, referring to the war now unleashed around them. "Eight years and eight divisions?" This was the estimate that General Matthew Ridgway had given President Eisenhower when the latter inquired what it might take to rescue French forces from their debacle in Vietnam.

I asked Petraeus why he was so quick to voice such wry pessimism about the war's likely duration. "It was a sense that we're just taking the leadership structure off this country that's held it together," he said. "And we're taking the top off it with a pretty thin density of troops. And so it's 'O.K.—what's next? How does this go forward?' " In Najaf that first week, he recalled, he tried in vain to find a mayor who could help him stabilize the city. "I mean, everything just disappeared," he said. "You could just feel that this is going to be really hard."

President Bush and Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld did not share this intuition. The subsequent failures of White House leadership, blindness at the Pentagon, civilian arrogance in Baghdad, and misguided generalship in the field have been richly documented in such books as "Cobra II," by Michael Gordon and Bernard E. Trainor; "Fiasco," by Thomas Ricks; "Imperial Life in the Emerald City," by Rajiv Chandrasekaran; "The Assassins' Gate," by George Packer; and "State of Denial," by Bob Woodward. Again and again, from 2004 until 2006, American military commanders in Iraq found that they did not have enough American and Iraqi troops to provide security for civilians or to hold ground once it had been cleared of enemy fighters. The generals made killing and imprisoning insurgents their priority, instead of attempting to change the conditions in which the insurgency thrived, and they repeatedly overestimated the reliability of Iraqi forces; Petraeus himself contributed to this last pattern of error, during his second tour in the country, between 2004 and 2005, when he oversaw a command to train and equip Iraqi soldiers and police.

In December, 2005, Iraqi citizens braved violence to elect a parliament. The Bush Administration hoped a credible government might emerge in Baghdad, but negotiations to identify a new Prime Minister dragged on for months. Amid this stalemate, in February, 2006, Al Qaeda-inspired bombers damaged a beautiful and renowned Shia mosque in the city of Samarra; in the aftermath, Iraq descended into a cruel conflict between Sunnis and Shias. Death squads roamed Baghdad; some of the killers were Shia policemen working from the Interior Ministry. Bush and his advisers steadfastly refused to call the deepening violence a civil war, although by any reasonable definition it had become one.

According to officials involved in the discussions, it was not until June, 2006, at a retreat called by Bush at Camp David, that the President began seriously to reassess his strategy for Iraq. American policy was then encapsulated by the catchphrase, regularly pronounced by Bush, "As the Iraqis stand up, we'll stand down." General John Abizaid, at CENTCOM, and General George Casey, Jr., the field commander in Iraq, oversaw a war plan that emphasized handing off to Iraqi forces as much of the fighting as possible, as quickly as possible. Abizaid said he was concerned that a large U.S. occupation force would inhibit Iraq's efforts to govern itself. Casey agreed that reducing the American presence was key. Their outlook complemented Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld's endorsement of a relatively small force to carry out the original invasion in 2003, and his subsequent decisions to minimize U.S. troop commitments in order to hasten a transfer of responsibilities to the Iraqis.

The Pentagon had planned to reduce American forces in Iraq from fifteen combat brigades to about twelve by the end of 2006. (The number of soldiers in a combat brigade can range from about thirty-five hundred to as many as five thousand.) In July of that year, however, Casey called Marine General Peter Pace, the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, to say that, because of the deepening sectarian violence, he did not think he could recommend going forward with those withdrawals. "In fact, I may need to ask for more troops," Casey said, as Pace recalled it.

Pace concluded that he needed to "do some homework" and to reëxamine the war "from soup to nuts." He initiated three parallel Iraq strategy reviews that summer—one by Casey and his staff, a second by Abizaid at CENTCOM, and a third by his own office at the Pentagon. Pace told Bush that he would probably need until the autumn to synthesize this work and report back.

The contest under way in the United States to take credit—politically or in the eyes of history—for the recent reduction of violence in Iraq has barely begun; the memories of participants in the White House decision-making that led to the surge are, inevitably, selective, and, as one official involved put it, the deliberations were entirely "non-linear." According to interviews with civilian and military officials, however, the critical Bush Administration debates occurred during the last six months of 2006, climaxing in the President's decision to dispatch more troops to Iraq, and to appoint Petraeus as Commanding General early in 2007. The deliberations appear to have been similar to other cases in which postwar American Presidents have decided upon the use of force, at least in one respect: there was a prolonged, often delicate and indirect call-and-response between the White House and the Pentagon about the decision to put soldiers in harm's way. Rumsfeld, the interlocutor between the President and the military, had long resisted any plan to send American divisions abroad for projects that smacked of nation-building. As Iraq crumbled, however, Bush, Vice-President Cheney, and their staffs nonetheless prodded the Pentagon for more troops. For their part, the Joint Chiefs of Staff resisted these requests and simultaneously adapted to them.

The Joint Chiefs' 2006 study group on Iraq strategy, under Pace, became known as the Council of Colonels—it was made up of just over a dozen officers selected because of their Iraq combat experience or their reputations as strategic thinkers. Beginning that summer, they worked from cubicles in the Pentagon basement. At periodic meetings in the Tank, the secure conference room of the Joint Chiefs, "anyone could speak," recalled Peter Mansoor, then an Army colonel, who participated. "You had colonels challenging the thinking of four-star generals and admirals."

"Like any military operation, without being overly glib about it, you talk about everything from 'Surrender' to 'Nuke 'em,' " Pace recalled. In essence, however, he said, "it was always a discussion about how much of our force do we need to commit to buy the Iraqis enough time for their force to do the job. . . . How could we get ourselves back on track to that goal?"

After five years of continuous war in Afghanistan and then in Iraq, the Joint Chiefs were increasingly concerned about the demands being placed upon American land forces; some Pentagon commanders feared that the Army and the Marines were approaching a breaking point. Talented young officers were abandoning their careers because their lengthy overseas deployments made it difficult to hold on to a marriage or start a family. Military recruiters struggled to meet their goals; the Army's logistics system heaved under the pressure of two expeditionary conflicts. Strategic planners at the Pentagon worried about how well the Army could respond if it had to dispatch troops unexpectedly to a conflict elsewhere in the world.

Any new deployment to Iraq "was going to add additional strain to the armed forces of the United States," Pace told me. "The math was the math." Finite combat troop levels in the Army and the Marines meant, for example, that if more troops were dispatched, the length of overseas deployments would have to be increased from twelve to fifteen months—a major new burden on the force.

Bush, however, had invested his Presidency in the Iraq war. Bush told his National Security Council staff, as one of them recalled it, that he feared that if the U.S. did not change its strategy the war would be lost. On another occasion, according to this former official, Bush declared that there were few things he cared about more than the health of the United States military, but losing in Iraq was one of them.

In September, 2006, the N.S.C. began its own review of Iraq policy. "Of the assumptions that were no longer valid, the most important one was that 'political progress will drive security gains,' " Meghan O'Sullivan, then the deputy national-security adviser for Iraq and Afghanistan, recalled. "At a certain level of violence, you cannot expect people to make serious decisions about their country's future. Iraq reached that point."

As a graduate student, O'Sullivan had written her doctoral dissertation on Sri Lanka's civil war. She was well acquainted with academic theories and case studies about how civil wars end: either the stronger party defeats the weaker, or a third force intervenes to create a truce. In Iraq's conflict, a decisive victory by the country's Shia majority over its Sunni minority would likely cost tens of thousands of civilian lives and would also destabilize the Middle East. Unpopular though the United States might be, American soldiers could serve as a third force, O'Sullivan thought. "We believed in my office that U.S. forces were the only neutral force that the Iraqis had," she said.

In early October, at the instigation of Stephen Hadley, Bush's national-security adviser, William Luti, a retired U.S. Navy captain who served as a senior director on the N.S.C. for defense policy and strategy, produced a PowerPoint briefing, "Changing the Dynamics in Iraq," with a detailed subtitle: "Surge and Fight, Create Breathing Space, and Then Accelerate the Transition to Iraqi Control." Along with similar work developed outside the Administration by defense analysts such as Jack Keane, a retired Vice-Chief of Army Staff, Luti's briefing provided a framework for a Cabinet-level debate on the possibility of a new Iraq deployment.

On November 7th, American voters handed control of Congress to the Democratic Party, whose leaders had pledged to try to end the war. The next day, Bush accepted Rumsfeld's resignation, which became effective in mid-December. By this time, Bush later told Fred Barnes, of the *Weekly Standard*, "I was thinking about a different strategy based upon U.S. troops moving in there in some shape or form, ill-defined at this point, but nevertheless helping to provide more security through a more robust counterinsurgency campaign."

On November 10, 2006, the President appointed J. D. Crouch, Hadley's deputy, to chair a new interagency working group on Iraq strategy, a "deputies committee" made up of representatives from a number of Cabinet departments, as well as the Joint Chiefs. This group would pull together and reëxamine the various strategy studies percolating at the Pentagon, the N.S.C., and the State Department. Through the end of the year, Crouch's group convened as often as six days a week, often for six or eight hours at a time, in Room 208 of the Eisenhower Executive Office Building, next to the White House.

Each participating department submitted an initial policy paper. The State Department's memo was titled "Advance America's Interests, Preserve Iraqi Independence." Its thrust, reflecting Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice's view at the time, was that the U.S. should limit its ambitions to defending Iraq from Al Qaeda and Iranian-backed extremists, and to preventing sectarian violence from spinning out of control; the paper did not make a case for a surge. The Defense Department's initial memo, containing the

SILENT FIGHT #8997
So, so wrong SO wrong.
Oh, really?
Just like his father.
Unbelievable.
I'm so sure.
Not going to say a word.
Got another think coming.
You definitely have some unresolved issues, yessirree Bob.
Mmm-hmm.
So, that's what you think. Isn't that interesting.
Just like her mother.

essence of current Pentagon policy, was called "Accelerate the Transition to Self-Reliance."

The Joint Chiefs' advice to the White House was complicated, reflecting divided opinion among them, according to the account of its former chairman, Pace. By mid-November, the General told me, the heads of the Army, Navy, Marine Corps, and Air Force were "not at all focussed on 'accelerating the transition' " to Iraqi forces anymore. "We were focussed on, by then, the need to add additional U.S. troops." At the same time, Pace continued, the service chiefs had also concluded that "a military surge in and of itself was not going to be sufficient." Unless the Bush Administration developed, in addition, a convincing strategy for improved economic development and governance in Iraq, Pace said, "militarily, we'd be using the reserve assets of the United States inappropriately."

At a December meeting in the Tank, Bush endorsed the Joint Chiefs' recommendations for a parallel surge effort in Iraq by the State Department and other U.S. civilian agencies. The President also pledged to seek fresh commitments for reform from Iraqi Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki, who had been appointed in the spring of 2006, and who had worked to only a limited extent with the Bush Administration. Maliki's control over his own administration seemed questionable; his government displayed little competence, and his cabinet and his allies among Iraq's Shia Islamist political parties promoted an ardently sectarian agenda. Nonetheless, Bush told the Joint Chiefs he would work to persuade Maliki to become a constructive partner. To assuage his generals further, Bush promised that he would seek a permanent increase in the size of the Army and the Marine Corps; he later requested authority to recruit about a hundred thousand soldiers and marines, which would raise the size of the two forces, including National Guards and reserves, to more than 1.2 million.

It was almost Christmas; the President's policy reviews had dragged on for nearly half a year. (More than ten thousand Iraqi civilians and more than five hundred American soldiers died in Iraq between the first of June, 2006, and the end of December.) Bush believed that he required such extensive deliberations "at a very minimum," he told Fred Barnes, in order to win the Joint Chiefs' support for more troops, and so that other Cabinet departments felt "they had a say in the development of a strategy."

Petraeus had played only a marginal role in the decision-making. He appeared before Pace's Council of Colonels and met with Cheney, outlining for the Vice-President his ideas about counterinsurgency. Consulted by the White House during a last round of debate, the General also asked for a deployment of the greatest possible size.

On January 10, 2007, Bush announced in a nationally televised speech that he was sending "more than twenty thousand" additional troops to Iraq. "Many listening tonight will ask why this effort will succeed when previous operations to secure Baghdad did not," Bush said. "This time, we'll have the force levels we need to hold the areas that have been cleared."

When Bush appointed Petraeus to the Iraq command, the General was running an Army think tank, the Combined Arms Center, at Fort Leavenworth. The billet had allowed him to tackle the intellectual project he had been working toward since his days at Princeton: a complete rewrite of the Army's field manual on counter-insurgency operations. On this project, Petraeus had displayed the instincts of a Manhattan book editor. Early on, he organized a conference with Harvard University's Carr Center for Human Rights Policy, inviting journalists and political scientists to contribute their ideas about nation-building. Petraeus recruited as lead drafters his West Point classmate Conrad Crane, the historian, and John Nagl, whose dissertation at Oxford became the influential book "Learning to Eat Soup with a Knife: Counterinsurgency Lessons from Malaya and Vietnam." Their final product, Field Manual 3-24, "Counterinsurgency," published in December, 2006, just as Bush decided upon the surge deployments, was reviewed on the front page of the Sunday *Times Book Review*, a first in Army field-manual letters.

Its reception reflected Petraeus's considerable media networking skills as well as the appeal of counter-insurgency doctrine among sections of the country's liberal-minded intelligentsia. This was warfare for northeastern graduate students—complex, blended with politics, designed to build countries rather than destroy them, and fashioned to minimize violence. It was a doctrine with particular appeal to people who would never own a gun. The field manual illustrated its themes with case-study vignettes whose titles suggested the authors' ethical ambitions: "Defusing a Confrontation," "Lose Moral Legitimacy, Lose the War."

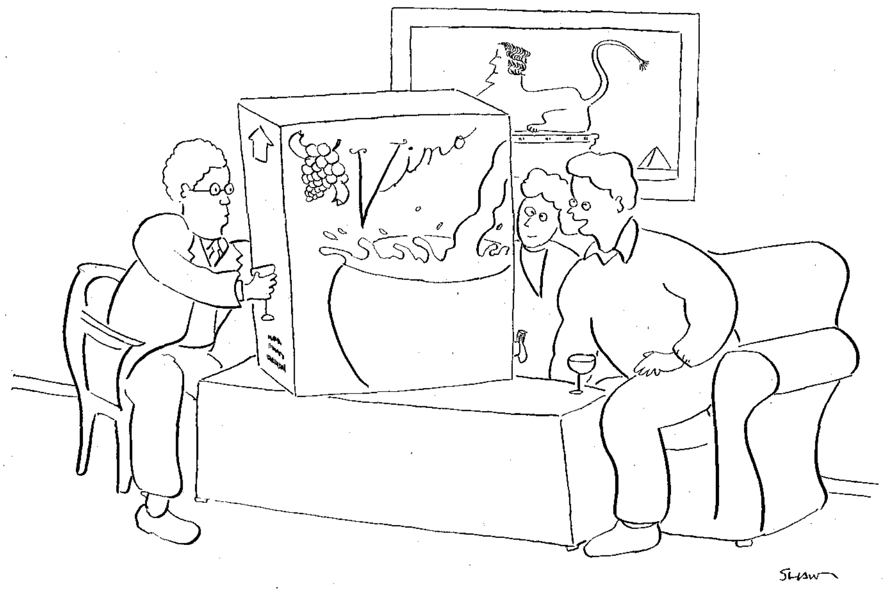
Within the Army, the publication of "Counterinsurgency" marked a triumph for Petraeus and his intellectual allies in their effort to reshape post-Vietnam doctrine: "Throughout its history, the U.S. military has had to relearn the principles of counterinsurgency," the manual's introduction declared. "It is time to institutionalize Army and Marine Corps knowledge of this longstanding form of conflict."

It was one thing to write the book; it would be another to apply its theories in Iraq. "You have all kinds of self-doubt—obviously you do," Petraeus said when I asked if he had considered whether Iraq might prove impervious to his ideas. That winter, the General noted, as he was preparing for his confirmation hearings, Casey and Zalmay Khalilzad, the outgoing U.S. Ambassador to Iraq, had signed a classified evaluation of their own Joint Campaign Plan's progress; they had used the word "failing." Petraeus said that he respected Casey greatly; this formal admission struck him as courageous and honorable, but also "quite stark." He decided to approach the Iraq command as if this would be the "last job" of his Army career, he recalled.

Petraeus asked Peter Mansoor, who had participated in the Council of Colonels, to serve as his executive officer in Iraq, a position similar to that of chief of staff in a civilian office. Just before they departed, in early February, Mansoor, who is a West Point graduate with a doctoral degree in military history, went bowling with his family. He bought his daughter a fifty-cent plastic prize from a gumball-type machine. It turned out to be a poker chip marked with a royal flush. On the flight to Baghdad, Mansoor recalled, he handed the chip to Petraeus and invoked the mantra of high-rolling gamblers. "Hey, sir," he said. "All in."

"Population security" was the big idea that Petraeus sought to communicate upon arrival in Iraq. This goal—to make Baghdad's neighborhoods safe for civilians—was "the overriding objective of our strategy," he declared in a letter to his troops on March 15th. "We can't commute to the fight in counter-insurgency operations; rather we have to live with the population we are securing. . . . I also count on each of you to embrace the warrior-builder-diplomat spirit."

Petraeus and Crocker summoned to Baghdad a group of outside advisers who became known as the Joint Strategic Assessment Team. The members included more than a dozen military officers, Iraq specialists from the State Department, and outside academics who could think conceptually about the war and the application of counter-insurgency doctrine. Among them was David Kilcullen, an Australian specialist on guerrilla warfare, whose unconventional thinking had made him an influential figure in the State Department's counterterrorism office. Petraeus also invited Stephen Biddle, a military analyst and a Democrat, whose published work about Iraq had previously made the General "very unhappy," in Biddle's words. The invitation to join the advisory group, Biddle concluded, spoke to "a different way of thinking and working." Once in Iraq, he found that if Petraeus believed the tenets of the counter-insurgency field manual were impractical on a particular point, he simply disregarded them. "This clearly was not a guy who feels obliged to follow



"More Château de Costco?"

some cookbook, even one he co-wrote," Biddle said.

Petraeus divided his time between managing Iraq and managing Washington. "We had to tamp down expectations," Mansoor recalled. "We had to fight the information war with a variety of audiences in mind. There were the Iraqi people. There were our own forces. There were our own people. There was our own government. . . . General Petraeus kept saying, 'Things are going to be worse before they get better.' . . . He wasn't trying to sell anything. He was very adamant about telling it like it is: 'Don't put lipstick on the pig.' "

The General's relationship with Bush proved to be one of the easiest to manage. At least once a week, the General and Ambassador Crocker participated in a videoconference with the President, the Vice-President, General Pace or his deputy, and Admiral William Fallon, Abizaid's successor at CENTCOM, among others. The video meetings allowed Petraeus and Bush to communicate directly, and they also permitted Bush to avoid ponderous Cabinet-level deliberations by making his intentions on Iraq clear to all of his uniformed commanders simultaneously. Fallon, however, was uneasy about the conferences; the Admiral was Petraeus's superior, and the videoconferences did not conform to a normal chain of command. Pace supported this approach, as an exigency of war. "For the President to be talking directly to his senior commander in the field makes all the sense in the world in a war where you have the capacity" through video links, he believed. Inexorably, however, tensions developed between Fallon's command staff, headquartered in Tampa, Florida, and Petraeus's staff at Victory Base.

Not long after the surge began, for example, Fallon undertook his own independent review of Iraq strategy; he dispatched Vice-Admiral James A. Winnefeld, Jr., to Iraq to examine the war. Fallon had to balance troop deployments to Iraq with requirements elsewhere in the Middle East and Afghanistan. He questioned whether Petraeus might be able to plan troop reductions on a faster timetable. Petraeus ultimately had his way, but the back-and-forth ratcheted up the pressure on the General's staff. Petraeus's aides felt that Fallon should be trying to win support for Iraq from neighboring Middle Eastern governments, not second-guessing their strategy and deployment timetables.

In counter-insurgency operations, Petraeus has written, the critical issue for military commanders is "how to think, rather than what to think." In part because insurgencies and civil conflicts involve political and perceptual contests as well as military ones, "tactics—both those of the enemy and our own—constantly change, and the winning side is generally that which learns faster."

Bush and his National Security Council staff originally designed the troop increase largely as a way to buy time for Iraq's senior political leaders to reach agreement on critical national compacts such as sharing oil revenues and reintegrating former Baath Party members into government—a top-down model for the country's progress. Yet factionalism and sectarian stalemate within the Iraqi cabinet and parliament proved to be intractable throughout 2007 and beyond. Instead, unexpectedly, the most important political development in Iraq during the first year of Petraeus's command—the change of heart by the Sunni tribes—took place in Anbar Province, a large area stretching to the west of Baghdad, which had been the site of some of the war's bloodiest fighting for three years after the invasion.

In September, 2006, long before the surge had been decided upon, Sunni tribal sheikhs had approached U.S. Marine commanders and offered to switch sides—to align themselves with the United States against Iraq's Al Qaeda-affiliated Islamist militants. The sheikhs had grown weary of Al Qaeda's brutality, puritanism, and arrogance, and they resented its attempts to take control of tribal smuggling businesses. By the time Petraeus arrived, the Anbar Awakening, as it would become known, had started to spread. Petraeus and his commanders turned it into a national project; they spent millions of dollars of American funds and backed up the Sunni sheikhs with military operations against the tribes' enemies. Ultimately, during 2007 and 2008, the United States Army hired about a hundred thousand militiamen, known as Sons of Iraq, at three hundred dollars per month, to serve as neighborhood guards; the Army eventually expanded the program to include Shia militiamen. Most of these guardsmen were former insurgents, some with a history of killing Americans. To Petraeus and his advisers, however, the project presented a prime example of adaptive learning. "Anbar, you could just feel it flipping," Petraeus told me. "Really, the early spring, the mid-spring of 2007, it just started to speed down the chain."

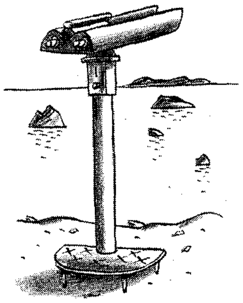
Initially, as U.S. soldiers pushed into Baghdad neighborhoods they had not previously occupied, violence rose, and that spring more U.S. soldiers and marines died in combat than during any previous period of the war. It was a time when it seemed that Petraeus could not complete a routine meeting without being interrupted by an aide handing him a three-by-five card reporting the latest assassination of an Iraqi ally or the detonation of a car bomb in a Baghdad marketplace. American helicopters crashed; soldiers under the General's command were kidnapped and mutilated; and when the reports of multiple casualties would arrive, he recalled, "you sort of put your hands on the desk and think about it for a second."

No general—not even a self-conscious modernizer and communicator like Petraeus—can win the confidence of his own soldiers through the quality of his doctrinal ideas. When the General first arrived, many soldiers and mid-level officers were "leery" of the General's desire to push into insurgent-infested neighborhoods, "from a force-protection perspective and a creature-comfort perspective," Marvin Hill, the sergeant major who supervised the force's noncommissioned officers, said. "There were units on the ground on their third rotation; some of them felt they were being punished for something," Hill recalled. "The only way you could really get some of the mid-grade leaders to really understand was to say, 'We will not commute to the fight.' " That slogan spoke to their toughness, but, just as important, Petraeus himself came across as "bigger than life in the eyes of the troops," Hill said. "Competitive, physical—that's what appeals to them."

Petraeus "did a lot of reading on Lincoln and Grant," Mansoor recalled, and he would then talk with his subordinate commanders about "Grant's idea that we need to stop thinking about what the enemy can do to us—let's start thinking about what we can do to the enemy."

"At certain points, this was about force of will and determination and that we are going to prevail," Petraeus told me. He tried to project an air that was resolute but "not cocky," he recalled. On the worst days of combat casualties, he and his senior officers—inspired by an anecdote that Petraeus had read—quoted what Grant had reportedly said to William Tecumseh Sherman after a day of carnage at the Battle of Shiloh. As Petraeus described it, "Grant literally has his back to the river—the whole army has its back to the river. He's in the rain, because the only place with shelter was full of wounded people who were obviously crying out. . . . The rain's dripping off his hat, and he's got this soggy cigar, as he always did. Sherman comes up and says, basically, 'Well, we had a tough day today, Grant.' And Grant says, 'Yup. Lick 'em tomorrow, though.'"

On a Saturday morning in late July of this year, Petraeus invited me to his morning Battle Update Assessment at Victory Base. The meeting began promptly at seven-thirty. Several dozen officers rose to attention as the General entered an amphitheatre-style room. He took his place before a wall of flat video screens; some of the monitors displayed PowerPoint slides, while others showed the faces of colleagues piped in on secure conferencing lines. The colonels and majors who delivered the morning's briefings spoke crisply. There was a heavy emphasis on numbers, describing a wide range of subject matter—enemy attacks carried out, development projects completed, kilowatt hours of electricity generated, barrels of oil exported, palm trees sprayed against disease, chicken embryos imported.



Afterward, I joined Petraeus at a nearby helipad and boarded his UH-60 Blackhawk helicopter for a day of what Army officers call "battlefield circulation," a version of management-by-walking-around. I sat across from the General's Arabic-language translator, Sadi Othman, an American of Palestinian and Jordanian descent who used to drive a taxi in New York, and who is locally renowned as the first player on the Jordanian national basketball team ever to successfully dunk. We lifted off and flew east above Baghdad's expanse of flat rooftops. Over his headset, Petraeus talked about the sectarian demographics in particular neighborhoods we passed. He pointed out the many concrete barriers, known as T-walls, that his forces had erected to separate Sunni areas from Shia ones, or to protect mixed districts from hostile outsiders.

Periodically, the General jabbed his finger at scenes below and inventoried what he called "counterintuitive" signs of "normalcy" on Baghdad's streets—a median strip under repair here, palm trees being planted over there. "This is Iraq—we've come a long way," he declared.

This, though, was not Iraq but, rather, a section of its airspace being traversed by an armed helicopter. Petraeus gives many of these airborne, progress-on-the-march tours to visiting congressmen, journalists, and academics, and there was a cringe-inducing quality to some of his recitations as he skimmed above the country at an altitude of a thousand feet. The statistics about reductions of violence in Iraq are irrefutable; the country's qualitative experience of loss and partial recovery is perhaps more elusive. Petraeus speaks often about the "fragility" of Iraq's recent gains, and he is self-consciously cautious about ever voicing broad optimism about the war; yet, as a tour guide and war spokesman, he can sound preternaturally enthusiastic about his command's achievements. This problem of tone suggested something about the bubble that insulates any military leader at his level, perhaps, but it also pointed toward the treacherous complexity of Petraeus's performing role in what Army officers refer to as I.O., or information operations.

We flew on to Diyala Province, northeast of Baghdad, where U.S. and Iraqi forces were preparing a local offensive. We landed at Area of Operations Wolfpack, a base occupied by the 2nd Stryker Cavalry Regiment, the oldest continuous regiment in the United States Army; "*Toujours Prêt*" is the motto it adopted during its tour in France during the First World War. After lunch and yet more PowerPoint, we boarded armored Stryker troop transports and rumbled to Moqtadiya, the site of a recent clearing operation by American and Iraqi forces, directed against remnant Al Qaeda cells and criminal Shia kidnapping gangs.

In late-afternoon temperatures well above a hundred and twenty degrees, Petraeus took off his helmet, donned a cloth cap, and embarked on what he called a "market walk" down the town's main street, a trash-strewn corridor of tea stands, fabric shops, and food stalls. Soldiers of the 2nd Stryker in full battle gear formed a moving phalanx; they jumped around like Secret Service agents on amphetamines. Petraeus often makes these helmetless walks in areas that are, at best, marginally safe; nobody wants to be the captain or colonel in charge of the stroll that goes badly.

The General, who seemed cheerfully indifferent to the dark pools of sweat spreading on the shirts and suits of everyone around him, drank Pepsi with a local police chief and an Iraqi Army general, chatted with the town's mayor, bought fresh bread, received several hand-scrawled petitions from sullen-looking shopkeepers, and told a joke or two about the lingerie on sale in a store that Petraeus dubbed "the Victoria's Secret of Moqtadiya." The townspeople were compliant but sometimes hesitant; even after five years of occupation they seemed to lack a manners guide for how to behave when an American general and his mechanized bodyguard drop by for tea.

After sunset, we boarded a Blackhawk for the flight back to Victory Base. Petraeus settled beside the window and propped his feet on a red picnic cooler. An aide handed him a laptop computer and a satellite cord so he could check his e-mail. "This is what I'll miss the most," he remarked—"a morning boo-uh and then just spending the whole day out on the battlefield."

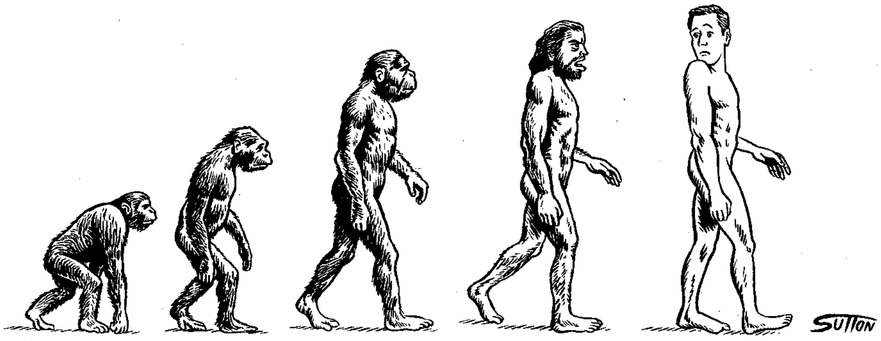
As we flew through darkness, I raised the subject of public relations. In 2004, on his second tour, Petraeus was placed in charge of training and equipping Iraqi Army and police forces. In September of that year, he published an op-ed piece in the Washington *Post* that later drew some criticism; there were Democrats, in particular, who felt that the General's statements about the progress he had made in training Iraqi forces were overly optimistic, and might even be interpreted as an improper endorsement of President Bush's reëlection. (The op-ed piece was cited in the MoveOn ad of September, 2007.) Petraeus regards this criticism as misplaced and unfair; he has long been a published writer, he said, and the *Post* essay was qualified, and certainly not intended as any kind of political argument.

To some extent, the criticism of the article was directed not at its particular claims but at the author's high profile. Unlike the other generals who have struggled to rebuild the Iraqi Army since the war began, Petraeus speaks regularly in public and grants more than an occasional interview; the op-ed piece was an extension of his habit of entering unabashedly into the public arena. In part, this reflects his professional beliefs about the importance of strategic communication; it also reflects his ambition. There have been very few successful military commanders who did not wish to be known or honored; Petraeus, however, has made himself visible while commanding a war that is regarded by many of its opponents, and even by some of its supporters, as morally repugnant.

As we flew, I asked if there wasn't a natural tendency for a general in his position to overestimate the capacity of Iraqi forces, if only out of sheer hopefulness that the indigenous troops could provide a ticket home for American soldiers.

"You have to fight your inner enthusiasm," he answered over the headset. "The military is a can-do organization." When he was training those Iraqi battalions, he continued, "I thought the approach was reasonably on track, but sectarian violence over time eroded it."

I pointed out that giving public voice to optimism about the war might be a way for a general in his position to create momentum for his command. "That's an area where I learned some lessons," he replied. "You have to be so precise, so that neither side can use it against you. Either side is trying to use what you say. The idea is to stay away from this whole optimism-pessimism thing. . . . No matter how many qualifiers you put in, there will be a car bomb that day and people will use that against you."



"Élitist!"

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The lights of Baghdad glowed on the horizon. Petraeus asked the pilot to take a long way around so that we could see an illuminated Shia shrine in the capital's Kadimiyah neighborhood. As we banked, our helicopter emitted flares, twinkling like holiday sparklers, to distract any heat-seeking missiles that might be fired from the city. A few minutes later, Kadimiyah's brightly lit mosque appeared on our right side; a neon-lit amusement park glowed to our left. Petraeus talked about the park's roller coaster, and the hours when it was most crowded, as if this were his home-town county fair.

Over the headset, I tried to summarize a recent essay by Zbigniew Brzezinski, the national-security adviser to President Jimmy Carter. Brzezinski had seemed to suggest that a problem with America's counter-insurgency strategy in countries like Iraq lay in its proximity to European colonial policies; we send out expeditionary armies and civilian administrators whose missions look uncomfortably like those of imperial subdistrict officers of old. Brzezinski, I said, seemed to argue that the United States had yet to come to terms with the strategic requirements of a post-colonial era.

"It's a wonderful debate to have," Petraeus answered. "But we are where we are." The United States had two counter-insurgency wars on its hands, in Iraq and in Afghanistan. My question reminded him, he continued, of a conversation he had joined a couple of nights before, in Amman, at a dinner party attended by Jordanian intellectuals, some of whom were veterans of the Arab world's anti-colonial Baath Party era. "At a certain point," he remarked, "you have to say, with respect, 'Let's take the rearview mirrors off this bus.' "

At the September, 2007, hearings on Iraq's progress, Petraeus's questioners included Senator Barack Obama, who noted that under the hearing's rules he had only "seven minutes," which he found "a little frustrating," because the war was "extraordinarily complex." Obama continued, "The question, I think, that everybody is asking is: How long will this take? And at what point do we say, 'Enough'?" The Senator's formulation evoked Petraeus's own question, on the sixth day of the war: "Tell me how this ends."

Petraeus opposes a firm timetable for withdrawal of American troops from Iraq, because he fears this might lead to a revival of intense violence in the country. At the hearing, Obama asked him, "If we're there—the same place—a year from now, can you please describe for me any circumstances in which you would make a different recommendation and suggest it is now time for us to start withdrawing our troops? Any scenario?" Ryan Crocker, who accompanied Petraeus that day, offered an answer, but the Senator's time expired before Petraeus could utter a single word in reply.

Obama's questions gnawed at the General. The issue was fundamental: What was a minimally acceptable end state in Iraq, from the perspective of American interests?

Obama and Petraeus have some similar talents—they are calm under pressure, cerebral, and adaptive. Their professional relations, however, have not been intimate. After the MoveOn episode, Senate Republicans introduced a resolution, transparently crafted for political effect, to condemn the "General Betray Us" advertisement; this ploy forced Senate Democrats either to cast a vote that would alienate one of their party's most important grassroots organizations or to cast one that would appear to question Petraeus's integrity. Obama skipped the vote. Some of Petraeus's aides took note of his decision disapprovingly. This year, Obama twice telephoned the General and expressed support, and he also praised Petraeus publicly. Still, he was not among those senators who made regular visits to Iraq. Late last spring, after Obama emerged as the presumptive Democratic nominee, McCain criticized him for failing to visit the war front or to consult with Petraeus. (McCain had been an early supporter of increased troop deployments to Iraq, a view that brought him into a natural alliance with Petraeus.) Obama scheduled travel to Afghanistan and Iraq; he was accompanied by two Senate colleagues who are military veterans, Chuck Hagel, a Republican, of Nebraska, and Jack Reed, a Democrat, of Rhode Island.

For Petraeus, because "the clock ran out" at the September, 2007, hearing, he recalled, the Senator's arrival offered "an opportunity" to answer Obama's question about the way out of Iraq. The main briefing for the three senators took place in a conference room at the U.S. Embassy complex. Petraeus and Crocker had mounted large storyboard charts on easels; for about thirty minutes, Petraeus ticked off bullet points with his laser pointer.

The General later described to me what he sought to convey to Obama about the prospective pace of U.S. troop reductions: "There are very rigorous plans. And they're being executed. And we actually met the goals that were in much of the security lines for the summer of 2008. Here's what they are for the summer of 2009—and for the end state, the eventual end state."

Petraeus spoke about the Shiite cleric Moqtada al-Sadr, who had called a series of ceasefires against U.S. troops during 2007 and 2008. Some analysts have argued that Sadr's pullback did more to reduce violence in Iraq than U.S. actions. Petraeus told the three senators, he recalled, that these ceasefires had not been undertaken "out of the goodness of their heart" but because U.S. and Iraqi forces had struck at Sadr's militias and killed many of his commanders and recruits as well as Iranian fighters who worked with him. This battlefield action, rather than Sadr's ceasefires, had deepened and sustained the lull in Iraq's violence this summer, Petraeus argued.

The General also reviewed classified charts that outlined the Joint Campaign Plan's priorities, divisions of labor, and timetables. The plan's basic prescription, he said, is to move successfully through Iraq's national elections, scheduled for late 2009, and then to begin a major transition: to get U.S. forces as quickly as possible to a role of pure overwatch. Exactly when this might be achieved, though, and how many troops might be required to make it work, is deliberately omitted from the plan.

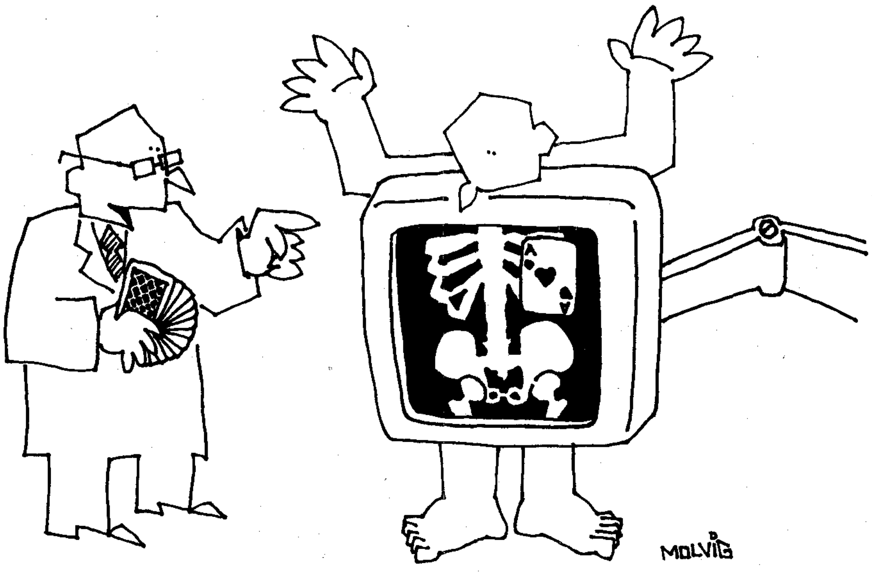
The biggest difference between Obama's goals for Iraq and the current Joint Campaign Plan is the Senator's pledge to withdraw all American "combat brigades" within sixteen months. (Under his plan, a "residual" U.S. force would remain, to support Iraqi troops and conduct counterterrorism operations.) By contrast, in the Petraeus-authored design, which McCain has endorsed unequivocally, U.S. troop reductions would not be firmly dictated by any timetables but would be "conditions-based." As the briefing ended and a discussion with the senators began, Petraeus made clear that he hoped to make further troop reductions in the near future, but he reiterated his belief that military commanders in Iraq needed flexibility to manage the pace of these reductions.

Reed cited the declaration made only days before by Iraqi Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki, effectively endorsing Obama's withdrawal deadlines. "You're going to have timelines—that's what the Iraqi political leaders will say to their publics," Reed told Petraeus, as he recalled the thrust of his remarks. "The reality here is there will be some type of timeline or deadline"—and Petraeus and other commanders needed to start adjusting to that.

Obama told Petraeus, in Reed's recollection, "that his responsibility as a prospective President was not limited to Iraq alone." Among other American interests that had to be considered, Obama said, was a need to rebalance American forces in the region to reinforce the war in Afghanistan. This would soon be Petraeus's responsibility, as CENTCOM commander, but the General did not declare his views on that subject.

Immediately after his meetings with Petraeus, Obama described for Terry Moran, of ABC News, what he considered to be the critical issue discussed in the briefing. "The question for me was: Does he consider the gains reversible when it comes to Al Qaeda in Iraq, or some of the Shia militias?" Obama said. "And, if so, what kinds of resources are required to make sure that we reach a tipping point where they can't reconstitute themselves? And I think what came out of the conversation was a sense that this is not a science. It's an art."

Obama also said he refused "to get



"And is that your card?"

boxed into what I consider two false choices"; namely, that he should either embrace a "rigid timeline" or pledge, in advance of becoming President, to do in Iraq whatever Petraeus tells him is best, "which is what George Bush says he's doing—in which case, I'm not doing my job as Commander-in-Chief. I'm essentially simply rubber-stamping decisions that are made on the ground." The Senator's distinction involves some intellectual acrobatics, but his meaning seems clear enough: Obama prefers his announced timeline, but he is not wedded to it.

Iraq may yet pull away, once again, from the presumptions of all American politicians and planners. During my recent visit, I discussed the war with several dozen American and British generals, colonels, and majors, and many of them described the conflict as having recently entered a new phase. Iraq's government, they said, is increasingly animated by independent ambition. This has been evident, for example, in recent negotiations between Maliki's administration and the United States over a new legal framework that would permit American troops to remain in the country; the current agreement, endorsed by the United Nations, expires at the end of the year. The negotiations are continuing, and the outcome is uncertain, but some on the Iraqi side have started to suggest that all American soldiers—not only combat troops—should leave Iraq within a very few years. Iraqi nationalism is rising, along with popular pride in the recent achievements of the rebuilt Iraqi Army, such as its successful operations, earlier this year, against the militias of Sadr in Baghdad and in the southern city of Basra. This gathering sense of Iraqi sovereignty and prerogative is, of course, the stated goal of U.S. policy, but it may prove to be no easier to manage on American terms than the insurgency was.

There remains a list of dangers that could reignite violence or even civil war in Iraq. Tens of thousands of Sunni Sons of Iraq must yet be transformed from militiamen into government servants in a Shia-dominated administration; so far, Maliki's government has been slow to accommodate these Sunni tribesmen. Earlier this year, when I spoke with Senator Joseph Biden about the surge, he emphasized the centrality of this challenge. Progress in Iraq will evaporate "unless they figure out what to do about eighty thousand people in the Awakening," he said. "Guess what? They're awakened. . . . They want a piece of the action, and they're not getting any."

In addition, the battle for control of Kirkuk, a city in an oil-rich region, must still be resolved. Iran continues to arm and train radical Shia cells and to cultivate influence in the Maliki cabinet. There remain multiple possibilities for military or political miscalculation by Maliki's government, or for the development of a coup attempt against him (a strikingly common form of sudden political change in Iraq during the past half century). With its big Army, weak government, and unpopular politicians, Iraq increasingly resembles the post-colonial states of Africa and the Arab world, which produced coup upon coup during the second half of the twentieth century. Even if Iraq holds on to its embryonic democracy, it may be settling into a state that resembles Algeria or Colombia—unstable, and troubled by internal violence, but secure within its borders, and unthreatened by existential collapse. This may not be the "victory" sought by Bush Administration speechwriters, but for many Americans in both major political parties, after the expenditure of so much blood and treasure in a war that became a strategic cul-de-sac, it would be more than good enough.

On September 16th, at the palace at Victory Base, Petraeus will hand over command of the Iraqi theatre to General Raymond Odierno, who will also be undertaking his third Iraq tour; he served as Petraeus's deputy during the first period of the surge. Petraeus will move to CENTCOM headquarters, in Tampa. Petraeus was selected for CENTCOM in considerable part because Bush and Gates hope that he can help to turn around the deteriorating war in Afghanistan; both Obama and McCain have said that they intend to increase American troop and financial commitments there. Petraeus did not want to "tip his hand," he told me, by going into detail about approaches to this next war, but he said that he was wrestling with such questions as how to build up Afghan security forces.

His most daunting challenge may lie in Pakistan, whose western tribal areas have become a sanctuary for Al Qaeda and for a revitalized Taliban movement, which has been widening its authority and launching increasingly effective attacks. To challenge the Taliban inside Pakistan, where American foreign policy is deeply unpopular and U.S. forces can operate only covertly, the United States relies almost exclusively on the Pakistan Army. "What works in Iraq definitely won't work in Pakistan in the same way," Petraeus said. "I mean, you cannot envision large numbers of Americans on the ground in any scenario, at least not in the way that they are here."

Petraeus will also oversee General Odierno in Iraq. Even so, none of the large questions about when and how the war in Iraq ends will be Petraeus's to decide; they will belong to the civilian chain of command in the next Administration. The General insists that he has no Presidential ambitions of his own; when the subject came up between us, he quoted the country-song lyric "What part of 'no' don't you understand?"

During our last meeting in Baghdad, in his office at the Embassy, we talked about the issue of political and military uncertainty—in Iraq and in the United States. Even if the next American President accepted Petraeus's conditions-based formula for troop reductions, and if Iraq's government acquiesced, I asked him, what would that mean, as a practical matter? How would the size and timing of troop withdrawals actually be determined?

In reply, the General spoke with some energy about the military planning process he oversees—how a forward headquarters in one Iraqi province can be closed and consolidated, for example, and how one can carefully "thin out" U.S. troops by building advisory teams with Iraqi brigades, and how his own knowledge of particular Iraqi commanders and units shapes his thinking as he constructs a transition to full Iraqi control. After a few moments, however, the General paused. The kind of planning he was describing was fairly technical, he said; he would probably never discuss that sort of detail with an American President. Like the invasion of Iraq, and like the surge, the withdrawal will have to proceed, ultimately, from a President's best instincts, with the advice of his generals. "The truth is, at the end of the day, some of that has to be subjective," Petraeus said. "I mean, there's no magic formula." ♦

NEWYORKER.COM

An audio interview with Steve Coll.

PROFILES

WHY ME?

Alec Baldwin's disappointment, undimmed by success.

BY IAN PARKER

Alec Baldwin, who stars in "30 Rock," the NBC sitcom that has revived his career and done nothing to lift his spirits, has the unbending, straight-armed gait of someone trying to prevent clothes from rubbing against sunburned skin. He is fifty years old, divorced, and lives alone in an old white farmhouse in the Hamptons and an apartment on Central Park West—feeling thwarted, if not quite persecuted. In conversation, he lets out an occasional yelping laugh, but he is often wistful, in a way that is linked to professional and romantic regrets, and to a period of tabloid notoriety last year, when an angry voice mail that he left for his daughter, who was then eleven, became public. He is very conscious of what is lacking in his life—a spouse, for example, and a film career something like Jack Nicholson's, and the governorship of New York—and his rhetoric can sometimes bring to mind a scene from "30 Rock" in which Baldwin, in his role as Jack Donaghy, a shameless but astute TV executive, stares at an equestrian painting by Stubbs and, in a growled whisper of longing, says, "I wish I were a horse—strong, free, my chestnut haunches glistening in the sun." According to Lorne Michaels, the executive producer of "Saturday Night Live" and an executive producer of "30 Rock," Baldwin "guards against enjoyment." (Michaels is a friend of Baldwin's and was a model for the Donaghy character.) "I'll say, 'Alec, you have one of the best writers in television' "—Tina Fey—" 'writing this part for you. It's shot in New York, where you chose to live. You work three days a week, you get paid a lot of money, you're getting awards. It's a great time in your life. It's an all-good thing. And, if you were capable of enjoying it, it would be even better.' " Or, as William Baldwin, one of Alec's three younger brothers, said recently, "There's always something for him to fucking whine about."

On a Friday afternoon in April, at the end of a week making "30 Rock," in a studio in Queens, Baldwin was on a quiet suburban driveway in northern New Jersey, moonlighting on a low-budget independent film being made by friends of his. The production did not have the funds to produce Hollywood bustle: the loudest sounds were birdsong and a distant woodchipper. Baldwin was wearing hunting gear—a bright-orange vest and camouflage pants—and this disguised him; throughout his career, he has typically been seen in fitted suits that signal a menacing delight in the exercise of power—perhaps most famously in "Glengarry Glen Ross," which he made when he was thirty-three. ("Third prize is: You're fired.") Today, he was playing the owner of a suburban property business, a man in a troubled marriage. When I sat with him, he said, "I'm so fucking tired." Besides performing in "30 Rock" and in this film, called "Lymelife," Baldwin had just finished writing a book on divorce and the law—part memoir, part polemic about the legal barriers sometimes put between a divorced parent and his children—which drew on his bruising experience after separating from the actress Kim Basinger, eight years ago. He said that he had been falling asleep at night with a laptop on his chest.

Tiffany Nishimoto, Baldwin's assistant and producing partner, handed him a phone, and he immediately began speaking into it: "It sounds to me like you want to . . ." Then he stopped and started again: "First of all, hello." He has a fast, heavily stressed, highly enunciated speaking voice, punctuated by frequent throat clearings—this can give the impression that you're hearing a warmup rather than the event itself. When he had finished, he asked about other messages. "What else?" he asked. She told him. And then: "What else?"

Turning back to me, he said of the film, which he was helping to produce, "This kind of stuff, it's so hard"—the tiny budget, the tight schedule, no more than two or three takes. "It's a domestic drama, and, as you might suppose, I've had my fill of that subject. This is the last time, in this movie, I assure you, you're ever going to see me arguing with a spouse." For a moment, he imagined life at the center of a big-budget drama, and remembered watching Leonardo DiCaprio at work in the lead role in Martin Scorsese's "The Aviator," in which Baldwin had a supporting part. "To be Leo!" he cried out. (Baldwin can be quite earnest, even as he keeps an ironic eye on his earnestness.) "To have a huge role like that! To play the role that is the fizz in the drink, you know what I mean? You *are* the movie! I wish I could play the lead role in one movie, one great movie." According to Baldwin, "The Insider" was the most recent "great opportunity" for an actor of his kind. "It was smart, it was relevant, it was topical," and the part went to Russell Crowe.

He was called to work, and rather stiffly walked a few paces into the house, where he directly began playing a tense family scene with Jill Hennessy, in the role of his wife, and Rory Culkin, as their son. Baldwin then returned to the driveway, to sit near a full-sized stuffed deer that was part of the apparatus of the film. "Maybe one will lead to the other," he said. "Success begets success. I've been offered a lot of movies now that '30 Rock' has been successful." In that show, Baldwin—carrying two hundred and twenty-five pounds, like an athlete in his sportscaster years—plays the corporate overseer of a fictional TV sketch-comedy show made at 30 Rockefeller Plaza, the headquarters of NBC. Donaghy has the calm joy of someone who knows that nothing matters in life but ambition; Baldwin brings deadpan gravitas to a giddy parody of business egomania. (Explaining a tuxedo worn in the office: "It's after six. What am I, a farmer?") His performance has been widely recognized: last year, he won a Golden Globe and a Screen Actors Guild Award, and was nominated for an Emmy. This year, he received the same three nominations: he won the SAG

Relentlessly self-critical, Baldwin says, "I don't think I really have a talent for movie acting." Photograph by Martin Schoeller.

"I know how expensive women's shoes are, but take the goddam jewelry!"

• •

Award, and on September 21st he will learn if he has won an Emmy. Although ratings for "30 Rock" have been modest, the show has been celebrated by critics. To all of this, Baldwin's response has largely been: Where did everything go wrong? "On a television show, precise acting isn't the order of the day," he said to me. "It's a sitcom. The idea is to hit certain beats, and we do it cleverly. But, you do a television show, you become a pastry chef. I'm a pastry chef now; I'm not the big chef at the big restaurant. I'm not Daniel"—a brief pause, then he jutted out his lips in a way that was familiar from his movies, and almost shouted the next word—"*Boulud*. You know?" He laughed.

"I always think, What if you just took your hand off the wheel, and slowly, over time, it all went away, and your life became about, you know, 'Is the mail here yet?' I always think about that." But this dream of disengagement quickly gave way: in the space of a few minutes, sitting in weak sun on a New Jersey driveway, smoking a cigarette, Baldwin imagined himself as the restaurant critic of the *Times;* the proprietor of an inn near Syracuse; and the presenter of a classical-music show on public radio. "I could do that," he said, and he wasn't exactly joking. He cares about classical music; he began to take an interest in his twenties. (Perhaps not surprisingly, he adores Mahler and can't quite see the point of Mozart.) "To sit there in the studio and just say"—a rich radio voice—" 'And now Tchaikovsky's Symphony No. 6, with Charles Dutoit and the Montreal Symphony Orchestra.' Click. Hit a button, and then you sit back and listen, and they *pay* you for that. And I can't imagine they pay you as much as the movies, but to me it's getting to that point where there's just something else I want to do. I don't know what it is. I'm tired of being somebody else. I spend the waking hours of my life saying things that other people think and say and do. And behaving as someone else. I'm tired of it. I want to be me! I want to be myself!"

Alec Baldwin once wrote a screenplay for a Western, derived from "The Fastest Gun Alive." He and his three younger brothers—Daniel, Billy, and Stephen, all of whom have had acting careers in film and television—were to portray a family of unnaturally skilled gunfighters. As Billy Baldwin, who appears in "Dirty Sexy Money," the ABC drama, recently recalled, "Basically, it was: Daniel's the outlaw; I'm the riverboat gambler who gets all the pussy, the shallow, good-looking sap; Stephen's the village idiot; and he's the fucking hero! He's the one who saves the day at the end; he's the Clint Eastwood. If you're looking for how my brother thinks about his brothers, and how he always felt about his brothers, that's it. *That's* the movie he wanted to make with his brothers."

The four Baldwin brothers, and their two sisters, grew up in Massapequa, on the south shore of Long Island, an hour's train ride out of Penn Station. "It was a checkered neighborhood," Alec Baldwin said. "The waterfront south of the highway was doctors, lawyers, and then, north of the tracks, very working-class: cops, firemen, tough kids. I definitely wandered between those two worlds." The Baldwins were not among the wealthy: Baldwin's father—also Alec—was a high-school teacher of history and social studies, and a football and riflery coach; Carol, his mother, who had worked as a substitute teacher, stayed at home. It was "an Irish-Catholic, rowdy, rambunctious upbringing," in Billy Baldwin's phrase. He described Alec as smart and disciplined but noted that "he ran in a crowd that was a little rougher than I did." He was a good athlete, "but nothing special—I may hurt his feelings saying that." Alec's tales of boyhood, delivered with uncannily precise sound effects of the everyday (screen doors, beer cans), sometimes place him in cars and on furiously pedalled bicycles, on his way to settle, with violence, points of teen-age honor. "I had three younger brothers committing me to things," Baldwin said, laughing. "It was 'My brother Alec's going to kick your ass!'

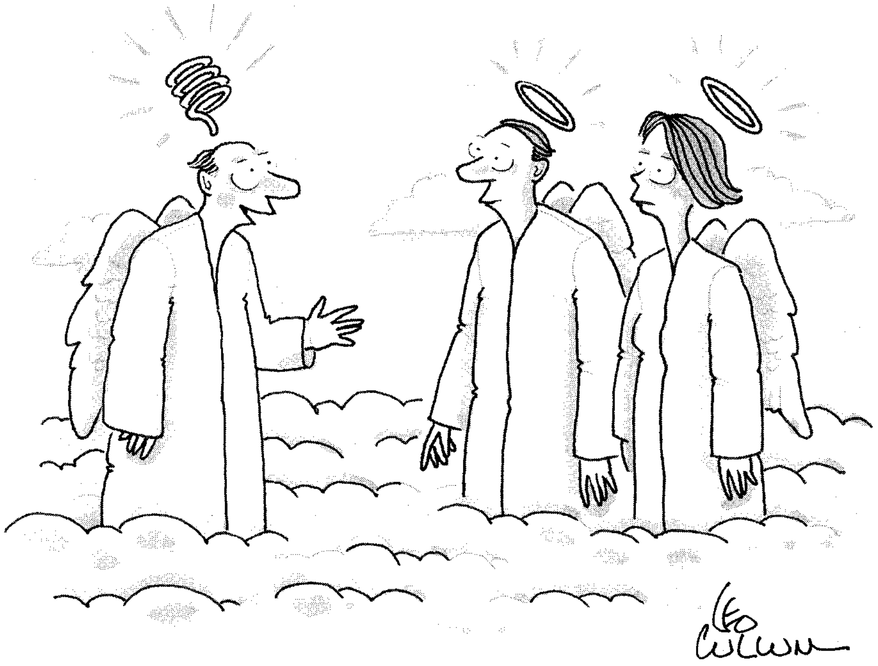
"My father was tough," Baldwin told me. "No. I want you to know something: My father was tough. My father would chaperone at high-school dances, and the toughest guy in the high school used to want to fight my father. My father broke his hand on a guy's head once in school. The kid was drunk; it was a big masculine challenge for him to pick a fight with my father. My father wasn't a violent or mean-spirited person, but he was a very strict disciplinarian in school and he knew that some of these kids only understood one thing. . . . The older I got, I learned to behave as he did, which was to not be afraid of anybody. And I'm not afraid of anybody. Wherever I go, I don't have a drop of fear in my whole body. Never. Never."

According to Billy Baldwin, “Alec put my father on a pedestal. He really idolized him.” Alec Baldwin said that he deliberately molded a relationship with his father (who died, of lung cancer, in 1983, when he was fifty-five and Alec was twenty-five), in a way that the others, who were younger, did not: “If you wanted to communicate with my father, you had to share his view of politics and culture. He was very well read, a very bright guy; you had to watch Cronkite, and ‘How Green Was My Valley,’ and after that five other Donald Crisp movies.” His brothers “didn’t meet him halfway. They’d go out the front door and play Wiffle ball.” Baldwin speaks fondly of his siblings, despite the potential sources of friction. (Daniel Baldwin—“Homicide: Life on the Street,” “Born on the Fourth of July,” “Celebrity Fit Club,” “Celebrity Rehab with Dr. Drew”—has had long-term problems with drugs; Stephen Baldwin, now a born-again Christian, has come to hold some conservative views, whereas Alec Baldwin is an active, highly informed Democrat and a regular contributor to the Huffington Post.) Nevertheless, for all his affection, he also calls them “very different people.” If a generation gap opened up when they were children, it expanded in adulthood, when the younger brothers—gate-crashing Stooges—joined him in the profession for which he had trained. “My brother Stephen, for example—this is not meant as a judgment on him, or to malign him—but, like a lot of young actors, they don’t have a lot of training,” Baldwin said. (In recent summers, Baldwin has given a weeklong acting class in East Hampton, where he urges students to “muscularize” their lines, or genially condemns their torpid delivery: “I wanted a meteor to come out of the sky and crush this whole building.”) Billy Baldwin told me, “I think he thinks we felt, ‘If that idiot can do it, I’ll give it a shot.’ And on some level that’s sort of true.”

Alec Baldwin began at George Washington University in 1976, with the idea of going into law and becoming President of the United States. At the end of his junior year, he split up with a girlfriend and lost a student-body election. Feeling underappreciated, he transferred to N.Y.U. and began studying at the Lee Strasberg Theatre Institute. Baldwin did not graduate at that time (many years later, he did). He was lean and intense, and had chest hair in which one could lose a telephone, and within a year he was in the New York-based daytime soap opera “The Doctors.” In 1983, he moved to Los Angeles and was soon offered a role in “Knots Landing,” the hit spinoff of “Dallas,” on CBS. His father died around this time. Billy Baldwin tentatively connects that blow—along with later career and relationship difficulties—to a general darkening of Baldwin’s mood, and an occasional habit of “grenade launching.” Alec Baldwin does not regard himself as unusually volatile—one wonders if his verbal facility has sometimes stood in the path of introspection—but he acknowledges that he used to have a sunnier self. His memory is that it survived until the end of the decade: “Pre-1990, I was just candy canes and lollipops and ice-cream cones and unicorns; I was happy-go-lucky!” (This timing is challenged by an interview that he gave in 1990, when, looking back at recent years, he said, “I was Mr. Telephone Thrower” and “My whole life was agony.”)

“Forever Lulu,” Baldwin’s first film, in 1987, was bad. But within a couple of years he had played six memorable supporting roles in six better-than-average movies—“She’s Having a Baby,” “Beetlejuice,” “Married to the Mob,” “Working Girl,” “Talk Radio,” and “Great Balls of Fire!”—with some beguiling note of severity, even cruelty, in each. Baldwin had a precise, self-contained style: his performances suggested that although he might accept an audience’s attention, he cared little for its approval. Even in “Beetlejuice,” some inner killjoy seemed to pull against the innocent, newlywed scampering required of Baldwin’s character. This was the last time a director asked Baldwin to play a blameless square—a Darrin Stephens—and one can survey Baldwin’s twenty-odd-year film career without finding a fully persuasive rendering of happiness. One has to be satisfied with flared nostrils and a dangerous flash of teeth.

In 1990, in a big step up, Baldwin played Jack Ryan in “The Hunt for Red October,” the submarine thriller. The film eventually made two hundred million dollars. That success brought Baldwin the first of many invitations to guest-host “Saturday Night Live”—so launching an admired secondary career as a mimic, and a parodist of such alpha males as Robert De Niro. (For many years, this skill was quite segregated from his day job as an alpha male.) In Hollywood, the success of “Red October” earned him “an all-access pass that lasts for five years,” Baldwin recently said. “You have to capitalize. And, if the movies you make don’t make money in that period, your pass expires.” In Baldwin’s estimation, it did expire. First, “Patriot Games,” the sequel to “Red October,” slipped away from him—he had a conflicting offer to play Stanley Kowalski in “A Streetcar Named Desire”



“It saves energy and makes me feel holier.”

on Broadway, and, as Billy Baldwin described the negotiations, “to a certain extent, he played chicken.” Alec Baldwin’s view is that he wasn’t reckless; rather, the sequel’s producers already had their eyes on another actor. Either way, in both “Patriot Games” and “Clear and Present Danger,” Jack Ryan was played by Harrison Ford. (In the *Times*, Frank Rich described Baldwin’s Stanley, in “Streetcar,” as “the first I’ve seen that doesn’t leave one longing for Mr. Brando.”)

Then began a period where, in Baldwin’s description, “I ignored all of my instincts and started to do what other people suggested I do, but I knew it was wrong.” Baldwin is perhaps too easily seduced by a narrative of grand failure, rather than accepting a quieter story of qualified success; but by his account—one that hurries past some fine performances—almost everything he did in film from that point on was, at best, dissatisfying. A year after “Red October,” Baldwin made “The Marrying Man,” and started a romance with Basinger, his co-star. The film was a commercial and critical disaster. Baldwin said, “After that, I did ‘Glengarry Glen Ross,’ where I only had a very small role, regardless of how appreciative people are of it. Then I did ‘Prelude to a Kiss’ ”—based on a very successful theatrical production, in which Baldwin starred—“and that was a bomb. In 1992, I did ‘Malice,’ with Nicole Kidman. And that movie was a very cookie-cutter thriller. It did pretty well. In ’93, I did the remake of ‘The Getaway,’ with my wife. That was a bomb. I did ‘The Shadow.’ That was a bomb. In ’94, I did ‘Heaven’s Prisoners.’ That was a bomb. In ’95, I did ‘The Juror.’ That was a bomb. In ’96, I did ‘The Edge’ and ‘Ghosts of Mississippi.’ And that’s when you hear the sound of the wheels of the train screeching to a halt. ‘The Edge’ and ‘Ghosts of Mississippi’ were my last shots at the arcade, so to speak. Both movies were out in ’97. They bombed.” (“L.A. Confidential,” starring Basinger, was released the same year; she won an Oscar. Not long afterward, the couple provided voices for cartoons of themselves on “The Simpsons.” Basinger was shown ostentatiously polishing her statuette. “Honey, why don’t you give that thing a rest? You’re taking the finish off,” Baldwin says. “When you win one, you can take care of it however you want,” she replies.)

THE CLAY ARMY

When the roof of the First Emperor of Qin’s tomb
caved in, six thousand life-size terra-cotta soldiers knelt

beneath its crumbling weight in the first pit,
alongside horses & chariots. Centuries before,

when the clay figures stood in perfect formation,
the rebel general Xiang Yu looted this sanctuary

of the dead, sequestering the bronze weapons
honed by these bodyguards of the afterworld

to kill the heirs of the charging drums & bells.
All their bright regimental colors are eaten away.

Their etched mouths are shaped for secret oaths.
Their eyes can see into the old lost seasons,

& their noses are dilated as if smelling lilies
in a valley. Rank is carved into each topknot,

“Do you want to know the truth?” Baldwin said to me not long ago. “I don’t think I really have a talent for movie acting. I’m not bad at it, but I don’t think I really have a talent for it.” He described the film actor’s need to project strength and weakness simultaneously. “Nicholson’s my idol this way. Pacino. There’s a mix you have to have where the character is vulnerable, the character is up against it, but there’s still a glimmer of resourcefulness in his eye—you look at him and the character is telegraphing to you this is not going to last very long. ‘I’m down’—Randle McMurphy, Serpico, whatever it is—‘but it’s not going to last, I’m still going to figure my way out of this.’ ” In contrast, he referred to Orson Welles. “Welles was a powerful actor, but he wasn’t always a great actor,” Baldwin said, with, perhaps, a faint nod to his own career. “Even when Welles was lost, he was arrogant.”

In the late nineties, Baldwin began to take leading roles in smaller films, and (at last) in comic films—most notably in “State and Main,” directed and written by David Mamet—as well as more modest roles in big studio productions. For a movie star just turned forty, he was prematurely willing to take a generational leap; in “Outside Providence,” in 1999, Baldwin played the father of a teen-age boy. (Long before he was fifty, Baldwin had become independent cinema’s first choice for divorced father, tough patriarch, creepy boss.) As Baldwin sees it, if his career had now moved past the stage of leading man, that was in part because he had become a father himself. Ireland, his daughter, was born in 1995, two years after Baldwin and Basinger were married, on an East Hampton beach. “I just became—you know I’m not saying this to sound like a good guy—I just was obsessed with being with my daughter, and trying to parent my daughter. I always wanted children. And I think, in hindsight, I probably made a mistake, in the sense of my career.” He compared himself with his brother Billy. “My life, in some ways, has been a half-measure. I didn’t commit myself all the way to my marriage and family, because I would have given up more. And I didn’t go all the way with just being completely selfish. I always wonder where my career would be if I was more selfish. Billy is someone who gave it all up for his family. And he has a lovely family. He’s happily married. He stayed married to one person. . . .”

I recently asked Marci Klein, one of Baldwin’s closest friends, if she had tried to discourage Baldwin from writing the book about his legal battle with Kim Basinger. “Oh, yes,” she said. Klein is a se-

tassel, & strand. The blind can read insignia
grooved into the uniforms. In the second pit,

in its L-shaped chamber, cavalrymen & horses
with pricked ears peer out of the red earth,

unbridled by time. Some warriors are sculpted
in unbroken *taijiquan* stances. In the third pit,

royal commanders huddle with scrimmages
in broken heads. The statues rise again in flanks

after they are pieced together & bandaged
with strips of wet clay. The last pit is empty,

no more than a cave, furnished with shadows
& imperial dreams from the Forbidden City.

—*Yusef Komunyakaa*

nior producer on "Saturday Night Live" and an executive producer on "30 Rock"; she has known Baldwin since he was first on "S.N.L." She told me, "I said, '*Do not write this book.* Nobody cares. Nobody wants to hear about your divorce anymore.' " She laughed. "He goes, 'You bitch!' I go, 'You loser!' We work well together."

Baldwin and Klein—who is forty-one and married, with young children—chaperone each other to award shows or sit at home and order takeout. "He's happiest eating Lupe's Mexican food and watching a movie," Klein said. "I like to ask him, 'Who fucked you up? Which girl in sixth grade?' " Baldwin often jokes about how they should have married. "But we're friends," she said. "And also I feel like I'm his mother, even though I'm a lot younger than him. I feel like I take care of him." She added, "Marriage is very important to him. He didn't want to get divorced. He wanted to make it work. He was very committed. With men, it's not the first thing—'I want to get married, I want to have kids'—but Alec is a different kind of guy. And therefore having it *not* work, for whatever reasons, was very difficult for him."

When I first spoke to Baldwin, one afternoon in the bar of a midtown hotel, we barely moved from the subject of his marriage and divorce for two hours. He drank coffee—he hasn't had alcohol since the nineteen-eighties—while a harpist played in the corner of the room. "I loved her," he said at one point. "I loved her. I loved her the way I loved my father. I loved her the way I loved my mother. I loved her the way I loved people I cared about on the deepest level."

In 2000, Baldwin and Basinger spent the year in a rented house in Bridgehampton. (They had bought a house in Amagansett, nearby, but it was being renovated.) Their daughter went to school locally. But, as Baldwin put it, "some people, no matter what you say, you can't get them to come into the water." That is, Basinger wanted a cloistered life, as he saw it, whereas he wanted to be out in the world. (Billy Baldwin, talking more bluntly of what he saw as Basinger's difficult behavior, said, "Alec's friends, family members, people in Hollywood had been asking, basically, 'Should we do an intervention?' "—to extract him from the relationship. "I wish he'd figured it out after three or four years, not ten.") Alec Baldwin's final dispute with Basinger, as he recalls it, was about Ireland's repeatedly catching colds at the end of that year. Baldwin saw this as normal, and good for a child's immune system; Basinger saw a Long Island winter making her daughter sick. In December, the couple broke up, and Basinger took Ireland back to L.A., where they also had a place. (Basinger, through a representative, declined to comment for this article.)

In 2002, after a period of improvised custody-sharing, Basinger and Baldwin entered litigation—Basinger now equipped with a lawyer whose name evokes, in Baldwin, a desire to find an insult that outperforms all earlier insults he has thrown at the man. In various venues and, eventually, in open court, the parties argued about Baldwin's access to his daughter. Baldwin has many complaints about the family-law system, and some record of this is in "A Promise to Ourselves," his forthcoming book, but his primary focus is what he regards as a simple injustice: he hoped to have a reasonable share of his daughter's time, and his ex-wife and her representatives were able to thwart him, in various ways, for years, in part by reference to behavior traits—or failings—that had not disbarred him from fatherhood when he was married. (So, for example, in 2002 Baldwin agreed to attend a course of twelve anger-management sessions. At the time, he was shooting "Second Nature," in London. He remembers standing on the street after the last session "and just sobbing that they had put this enormous obstacle in my way and I had succeeded.") When I asked Baldwin if he could have made the process smoother or quicker, he bristled: "That's where the thing gets twisted around to where the persistence of the father to want to have enforcement of his parental rights is viewed as abusive and aggressive—pathological behavior. 'All of our problems would go away if you would just back off. Why can't you just back off? You'll see the kid when I tell you that you can see the kid.' "

Some mental-health professionals employ the term Parental Alienation Syndrome to describe a condition in children damaged by one parent's propaganda about the other. (It's not formally recognized as a psychiatric disorder.) But "parental alienation" is also used in a looser, less clinical way—as Baldwin uses it—to refer to the mere daily flow of parental undermining. "Parental alienation is about people who narcissistically project their whole reality onto a child: 'I don't need you, so the child doesn't need you,' " he said. "And what you ultimately realize is the clock that they've been running out is childhood itself. The kid goes from five to six to eight. Kids have school, they have friends; the next thing—my daughter is twelve. They have no use for either of their parents when they're twelve. And you've missed everything. You've gotten only these little time-lapse things. The goal of the alienating parent is to kill contiguous time. People need reliability. They need regularity. And I've been a victim of a campaign to kill all that. You wind up being more an uncle than a father." Sometimes, in order to have lunch with Ireland, Baldwin flew to California in the morning and flew back overnight, to be at a rehearsal the next day.

Baldwin did keep working after the breakup: in 2001, he directed his first film, a remake of "The Devil and Daniel Webster," although the backers of the film were, at best, out of their depth; the financing collapsed, the film was never properly finished, the F.B.I. became involved, and, by the time it appeared, six years later—as "Shortcut to Happiness"—Baldwin had removed his name as director. In 2004, he was unexpectedly nominated for an Oscar for his role as a casino boss in "The Cooler." He was in "Twentieth Century" on Broadway, with Anne Heche. He had parts in "The Aviator," "The Departed," and "The Good Shepherd." But he says that he was distracted, in his professional life, by the struggle over his daughter. "Think I'm walking stiffly?" Baldwin asked me not long ago. "Yeah, there's a hundred-and-twenty-pound actress on my back."

"I used to be so upset," he said. "I used to be consumed. It ate me alive." When, in the spring of 2006, he began to discuss taking a part in a new sitcom, it was in a spirit close to defeat. "I kind of needed a harbor to duck into awhile," he said. "I was so beaten down. They came to me and said did I want to do a TV show. I never wanted to do a TV show. Never."

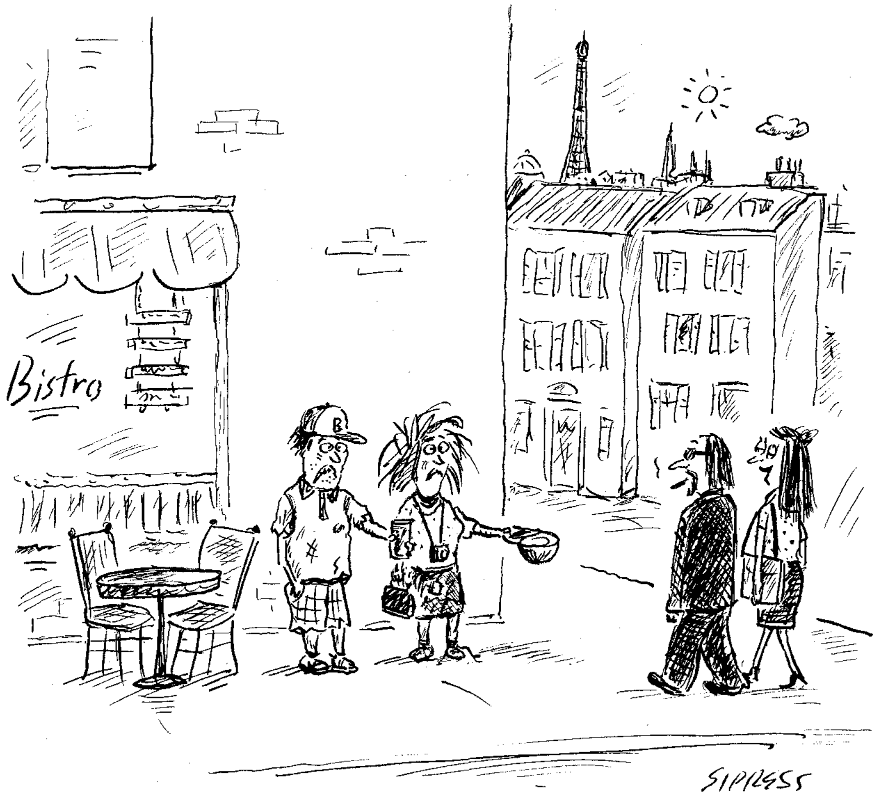
"30 Rock" is filmed at Silvercup Studios, in Long Island City. One afternoon near the end of the show's second season, Baldwin, energized by coffee, was in a social mood. When a cry of "Rolling! Rolling!"—designed to hush the stage and bring absent actors to their positions—interrupted a story that he was telling, he announced, "No, we're not," and then he got to his punch line, which required an impression of Rob Reiner, the film director. (The writers mine Baldwin's off-duty mimicry for their scripts; in a virtuosic scene last year, for instance, during a role-playing therapy session with Tracy Jordan, the troubled comedian played by Tracy Morgan, Baldwin's Jack Donaghy drew five characters out of the air—three African-American accents, one Hispanic, one Wasp—in little more than a minute.)

That afternoon, Baldwin and his colleagues worked on an episode revolving around a John McCain fund-raiser arranged by "the Committee to Re-Invade Vietnam." Baldwin's manner on the set was proprietorial: "Can we do that without the tubercular cough in the background?" Or, after an error, "Fuck, shit—I'm going to say it again. No, I'm going to do something else."

At the dimly lit edge of the studio, Don Scardino, the episode's director, told Baldwin that he should have more children. "I had my boy when I was fifty," Scardino said.

"My hero," Baldwin replied, with a sigh. A moment or two later, Tina Fey carried her two-year-old daughter, in a pink jacket, through the studio.

In late 2004, when Fey—then the head writer for "Saturday Night Live"—began to devise "30 Rock," it was in the hope, but not the expectation, that Baldwin would play the boss of Fey's character, Liz Lemon, who is the head writer for a show something like "Saturday Night Live." As Lorne Michaels said recently, "We were looking for a foil for Tina's character—someone who was right just often enough to be infuriating." Baldwin was wary. It was a sitcom, and he had played Macbeth and Stanley Kowalski on the New York stage. His mind turned to the example of Conrad Bain, the actor with a fine theatrical background who came to be Philip Drummond, the white father of two adopted African-American boys, on "Diff'rent Strokes." Embroidering on this thought, Baldwin imagined an actor who signs up for the quick money of a sitcom pilot quite confident that the show will never be commissioned: "The agent's saying, 'Don't worry, it's the biggest piece of shit in the history of show business.' Cut to six years later: you're in your dressing room, you're in season five, and on the wall are posters of you from the New York Shakespeare Festival—these achingly beautiful posters on the wall. By that point, you're making a hun-

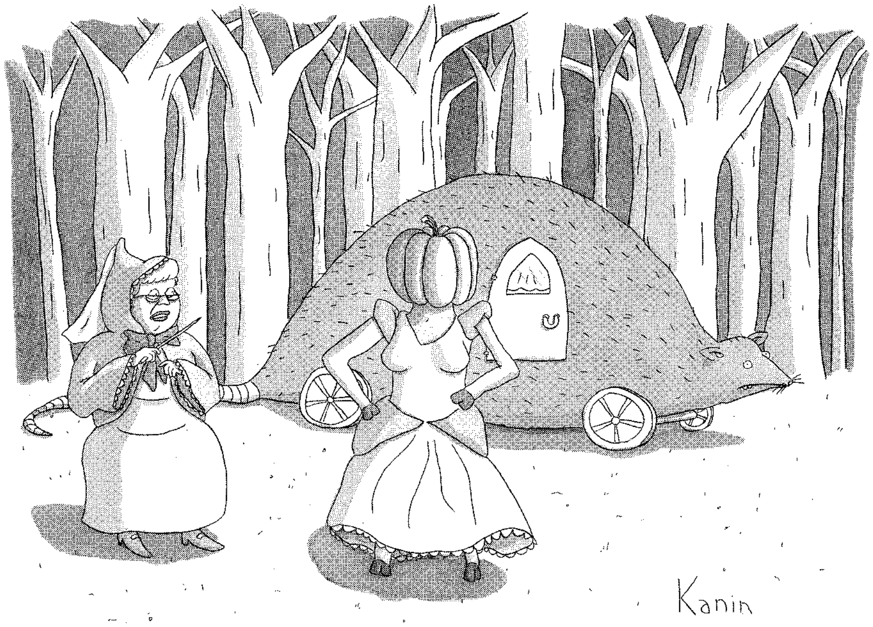


"Does it seem like American tourists are less arrogant than they used to be?"

dred and seventy-five thousand a week, you've got a house in East Hampton, you're getting laid constantly, you've got closets of beautiful Italian suits, and you've got three cars in the garage and you're paying alimony to your ex-wife who's living down in Florida. And you're doing the same jokes, again and again and again."

Baldwin, who admires Fey—"She's so bright you're always wondering if you're boring her," he says—agreed to be in the pilot, but on the understanding that, if the show worked out, he would appear in no more than six episodes a season, for six seasons. The pilot was made. NBC saw it, and offered to take the show only if Baldwin was in all twenty-one episodes of the first season. It was a fair judgment: Baldwin's Donaghy—too smart and too perverse to be a standard business blowhard—was an obvious asset. Although originally conceived as a bullying antagonist to Liz Lemon, by the time of the pilot the character had already begun to expand into a fellow-protagonist, a cynic who guides a neurotic. Unpunished for saying aloud what he should not even be thinking ("Don't ever make me talk to a woman that old again"), Donaghy became a kind of mentor to the writers and performers under him. In Baldwin's mind, "Jack Donaghy is Lorne, first and foremost. 'What am I, a farmer?' That *is* Lorne. I think he said that. Lorne's got a tuxedo in the glove compartment of his car. Lorne is a big-ticket A-list New York water buffalo. He's big on the Serengeti. Lorne is a person who seduces you into thinking that if you take his advice and play your cards right you're going to end up with his life."

Some actors might have taken NBC's avidity as a compliment. "I said, 'Go fuck yourself,' " Baldwin remembered. "I saw it as network scumbags trying to fuck you around. Zucker, I like"—Jeff Zucker, now the president and C.E.O. of NBC Universal, was then running NBC television—"but everybody who works for Zucker I have reservations about." He added, "If the show does succeed, it'll be something of a fucking miracle, because NBC hasn't done a fucking thing to help this show at all. This show is the red-*headed stepchild in the lineup*. They've gone out of their way to wring the last drops out of 'My Name Is Earl' and 'Scrubs.' Those shows are done! They're cooked! Yet they do a one-hour episode of 'Earl'! You've got to be fucking kidding me!" (Jeff Zucker told me, "Alec brings to '30 Rock' a level of comedic excellence that is unparalleled in network television.")



"O.K., let's try this again."

• •

Marci Klein gave herself the task of persuading Baldwin to sign up for every episode of "30 Rock," and, by implication, to have him acknowledge the possibility that, thanks in part to some mixture of charm and unyieldingness in his personality, his career might reach one of its peaks in a role that might take no more effort than telling a story over dinner. "I tried to explain to him, 'You're going to win every award.' I knew it. I saw it. 'Everything you are is coming out in that part.' . . . We kept meeting. We'd go for drives. I got down on my knees." In the end, Baldwin offered NBC twelve episodes, and the network accepted; he went on to do all twenty-one. "Even now, he has no idea how people worship him on '30 Rock,' " Klein said. "It's really the saddest thing."

That day at Silvercup Studios, the cast and crew ate tacos at long communal tables. Baldwin, sitting next to Klein, said, "I still want to do the episode of '30 Rock' where we make fun of 'Grey's Anatomy'—where everyone on our show talks about something important for thirty seconds and then goes in a room and fucks each other."

"That sounds like a sketch you should be doing," Klein said, referring to "Saturday Night Live." She had been pressing him to host again. He has hosted the show thirteen times. At fourteen, he would draw level with Steve Martin, the record holder. "Nobody does the show better than Alec," Klein said to me. "Nobody." Baldwin said there was no time. They argued back and forth.

"Seriously," Klein said.

"It's my daughter's spring break! It's my only vacation! With my daughter! It's my daughter's spring break!"

"She'll have fun!"

Baldwin's resolve was slipping. He said to his assistant, "Do me a favor, give me the phone. I'm going to call Ireland. I'm going to see what she says. The not-so-little Ireland. Five feet ten. Five feet ten!"

Baldwin has rather courtly manners. He told me, "Once, I almost choked to death on a piece of broccoli at Orso"—a restaurant in midtown. "So loath was I to inconvenience everybody else that I ran down the stairs to the men's room, so they wouldn't have to see me choke to death. So I wouldn't disturb their conversation. Literally."

But there have also been moments of public anger: in the early eighties, Baldwin tussled with a man who pushed his girlfriend on the street; a decade later, he was arrested after attacking a press photographer the day that he and Basinger brought Ireland home from the hospital. In 2006, during a run of Joe Orton's "Entertaining Mr. Sloane," at the Roundabout Theatre, Baldwin, annoyed that the theatre hadn't fixed its air-conditioning—onstage, his glasses kept slipping off his nose—punched a backstage wall, upsetting Jan Maxwell, a fellow-performer. In an e-mail to a friend, which later reached the *Post*, she wrote, "My bottom line was my physical safety, mental health, and artistic integrity." She left the production. Baldwin said recently, "I thought, This woman's working for my ex-wife's divorce lawyer! Physically threatened? You were in a room that was *fifty* feet away! I never had any interaction with this woman offstage whatsoever, other than saying, 'How are you?' " (Scott Ellis, the play's director, speaks supportively of Baldwin, who has become a friend. "I found two different actors. One was very giving and willing to adapt and collaborate. Jan was not that," he said.)

Then, in April of last year—not long after he finished shooting the first season of "30 Rock"—Baldwin left a voice mail on his daughter's cell phone. "I am tired of playing this game with you," he said, and his voice rose to a shout. "I'm leaving this message with you to tell you that you have insulted me for the last time." She had made him "feel like shit," he said, adding, "You've made me feel like a fool over and over and over again." He referred to Basinger as a "thoughtless pain in the ass" and to Ireland as a "rude, thoughtless little pig."

Baldwin had spent a week with Ireland in February, and another week in March. But, in the days leading up to the voice mail, he had not been able to reach her on the phone, despite an arrangement decided in court: four scheduled calls a week. He told me, "One thing people don't understand: I had lived my life for years a certain way. That is, always having a seat on the aisle when I go to the theatre, because I had to make my court-appointed phone call at a certain time. I mean, the hoops that I jumped through. So, once again: I was in a restaurant having dinner with my friends"—at Shun Lee, near Lincoln Center—"and I'm watching the clock and I get up and I can't get a signal, and I walk out into the street and, once again, for the tenth day, there's not even a ring—it goes right to voice mail. It's not even turned on, and I freak out—it was wrong, I'm sorry I did that—I freak out."

One evening a week later, the message was posted at TMZ.com, an online celebrity-gossip site. (Baldwin is sure that Basinger was responsible for the leak; she has denied it.) The next morning, it was a news story. Not long after that, near the subway station at Seventy-second Street and Broadway, a woman shouted at Baldwin, "Why don't you call your fucking daughter, you fucking asshole?"

"When the tape came out, I wanted to die," Baldwin said. "I wanted to die, literally. I didn't want to live anymore. Every night, I'd say my prayers"—Baldwin is still a churchgoer—"and I'd say, 'Please don't let me wake up in the morning. I don't want to do this anymore.' "

Baldwin said, "I had friends, a handful of people, of whom my sister Beth and my brother Stephen were the primary ones: real friends can hear you say the same thing over and over again every day for a year. The same thing, sobbing on the phone, saying, 'How did this happen? How did I get this way?' I only wanted to have a healthy relationship, a meaningful relationship, with my child."

Billy Baldwin said that, on first hearing the voice mail, "I was heartbroken for him and his daughter," but he also wondered if "there might be a silver lining, and he would be forced to say, 'I really should look at this.' Surrender. Just like A.A. The first step is admitting that you have a problem." He was encouraged that, a year later, "he's back into his relationship with Ireland. They're spending a lot of time together." This spring, for example, Ireland was in New York for her father's surprise fiftieth-birthday party. And the public scorn had begun to disperse. "As someone pointed out to me, the garbage barge of someone else's problem comes into the harbor right after yours," Alec Baldwin said. "There's a new shipment coming in every month."

On a cool rainy day in June, the parking lot in the center of East Hampton was no more than half full, but Baldwin drove around it slowly, as if not seeing the many available spaces, and then drove around again, and stopped only when he saw someone he vaguely knew—a youngish woman with a large umbrella. "You're a vision with your umbrella," he called out through the window, in a neighborly way. (In public places, Baldwin's broody gaze seems to be drawn about equally to women and to young children.)

"In East Hampton, I'm a nudist and I eat meat," Baldwin—a vegetarian—had said before my visit, expanding on the idea that he lived a quite different life on Long Island than he did in New York. "I shoot deer with a bow and arrow. I smoke the deer meat and eat it every morning with my eggs and toast. I am a homosexual. I listen to rock music, loud." We had met at his house. Baldwin was wearing sandals; his shirt was untucked. There was nobody else at home. (He recently broke up with a long-term girlfriend, an attorney in New York; then they got back together again, and then broke up again.) He gave me a brief tour of the house, which ended in a very large basement TV room, with pea-green walls, designed to please his daughter and her friends. Baldwin put on a DVD of "Strangers on a Train," and offered a running commentary: "Watch those boats glide in—directors now would be cutting, cutting." We watched up to the moment of the murder—the murder of a good man's unkind wife. Later, Baldwin recalled an afternoon in a hilly part of Los Angeles, after he first separated from Basinger but when they were still in contact. Together, they looked at a house for Baldwin to rent. Baldwin walked a little way down a path until he found himself, to his surprise, looking down a sheer cliff. "You've got to come over here and see this!" he called back to Basinger. As he told me, "She moved forward, her body moved forward, but"—he mimed a little shake of the head, a glance at a watch—"she said, 'No, no, come back, we've got to go. We're late.' And then I thought, She thinks I'm going to throw her off this cliff!"

We took a drive of disappointment through East Hampton. Baldwin talked of stores that had closed down, the car mechanic who abandoned him, the houses he should have bought but did not: "I almost bought that house right there." And later: "I cried, I wanted that house so badly." We drove near the beach. "You see the caps of those waves? They look clean—a little bit of a minty crisp green when they roll. I swim every day when I'm here. It cures anything that's wrong with you, physically and mentally."

He bought a coffee at Starbucks, where a young woman said something nice about "30 Rock." "I do feel I'm entering that Clinton phase," he said after we left. "I'm fifty. There are women who'll go up to a young movie star and they'll look at him, like, 'There are certain things I really want to do with you, and it's pretty plain to anyone why I'd want to do them with you.' And then there are people who look at me now, at my age, and they'll look at me and the look is 'I can't explain why, because it's kind of strange . . .' It confounds and perplexes even them. 'In spite of the fact that you don't look like a young leading man anymore, I'd quite like to throw you down on this blanket right now.' A bit of that."

We drove to the East Hampton Marina. "We're going to be so happy," Baldwin said. "We are going to be so fucking happy." For the first time since the previous summer, he was going out on the water. Geoffrey Briggs, the yard's owner, looked doubtful—"You remember how to work it?"—while Baldwin made a fuss over a small dog: "Chopper! My Choppy! Grrrr!" A few minutes later, we were in Three Mile Harbor, in Baldwin's sleek speedboat, which has white leather seats and pale-brown trim. He explained that the boat, at twenty-five feet, was as long as it could be while still providing the initial pop of speed that would allow a man weighing more than two hundred pounds to water-ski. "This is why we do sitcoms in Queens!" he said, as he accelerated to fifty-five miles per hour.

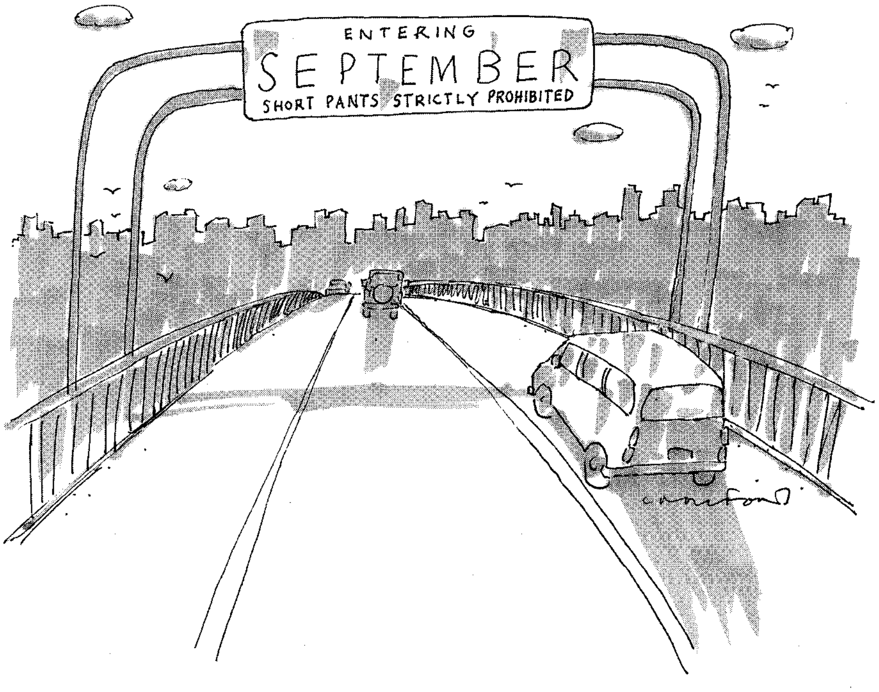
The clouds were low and threatening, but the water was calm. He headed toward Shelter Island, making fast, sweeping turns. "It's the only time in my life I can relax," Baldwin said. "The most relaxing places for me—and I want to swallow my own vomit when I say this, it sounds so phony—the most relaxing places for me are onstage doing a play and on this boat. When I get onstage in a play, I feel very safe, very protected, very fulfilled. I go out there, I can't tell you how happy I am: 'We have a chance of something.' With movies I always think to myself, We don't have a chance."

He pulled on the throttle, which became part of his rhetorical equipment: he slowed for reflective thought, then sped up again. He recalled a day, a few years ago, when he was driving through L.A., saw a car run a red light, smash into another car, and keep moving. Baldwin gave chase and, eventually, blocked the culprit in a cul-de-sac. Before the police arrived, the driver got out of his car—"Typical drug-addict, alcoholic, fuckhead look on his face. He was, 'O.K., what? What? You're chasing me. What?' This nineteen-year-old kid, his eyes blazing. I'm thinking, I'm going to come over there and knock your teeth down your fucking throat just because you're asking me 'What?' You know *what*, you little fuck? I saw you. I'm a pretty liberal person, but my liberalness comes from *what the government should be doing* with its excess of wealth. That doesn't mean I'm not a law-and-order person. I'm the kind of person—you catch the kid who's drunk and high and he almost killed a girl, let's take him in and beat the shit out of him for a couple of hours. Then he'll learn." He laughed. "I believe that!"

He talked about Presidential politics, and an idea for a second book—about "the social and political and legal fabric of male and female sexuality"—and his hope that Anne Heche would play his girlfriend in the third season of "30 Rock." We became slightly lost, and quite cold. We nearly ran aground. Baldwin's spirits remained high; or, at least, his determination to be high-spirited remained strong. "I'm so glad we did this," he said. "I'm so glad." At one moment, he let out, as if for the first time ever, a cautious whoop of pleasure.

An hour or so later, he was driving his handsome Mercedes back into East Hampton, for a late lunch. He called his assistant.

"You told him no dice to the event, correct? What else? Saying what?" Pause. "What else? Which is when? What's on the calendar now? Right? And her event is what? Whenever you see an invitation that says 'What could be more magical than an evening under the stars in the Hamptons?' you press delete. What's going on with my voice-over for Major League Baseball? What's their deadline? What else?" He banged the steering wheel. "What? Speak more clearly, I can't hear you. He said what? Satellite broadcast goes where? I'll look at that. What else? O.K. Take a deep breath. I don't know what you're talking about. What does their letter say? O.K. What else? O.K. What else? O.K. What else?" ♦



FICTION

FACE

BY ALICE MUNRO

I am convinced that my father looked at me, really saw me, only once. After that, he knew what was there.

In those days, they didn't let fathers into the glare of the theatre where babies were born, or into the room where the women about to give birth were stifling their cries or suffering aloud. Fathers laid eyes on the mothers only once they were cleaned up and conscious and tucked under pastel blankets in the ward or in semi-private or private rooms. My mother had a private room, as became her status in town, and it was just as well, actually, seeing the way things turned out.

I don't know whether my father saw my mother before or after he stood outside the window of the nursery for his first glimpse of me. I rather think that it was after, and that when she heard his steps outside her door she felt the anger in them but did not yet know what had caused it. After all, she had borne him a son, which was, presumably, what all men wanted.

I know what he said. Or what she told me he said.

"What a chunk of chopped liver."

Then, "You don't need to think you're going to bring that into the house."

One side of my face was—is—normal. And my entire body was normal from toes to shoulders. Twenty-one inches was my length, eight pounds five ounces my weight. A strapping male infant, fair-skinned, though probably still red from my unremarkable recent journey.

My birthmark not red but purple. Dark in my infancy and early childhood, fading somewhat as I got older, but never fading to a state of inconsequence, never ceasing to be the first thing people noticed about me, head on, never ceasing to shock those who had come at me from the left side. I look as if someone had dumped grape juice on me, a big, serious splash that turns into droplets only when it reaches my neck. Though it does skirt my nose pretty well, after dousing one eyelid.

"It makes the white of that eye look so lovely and clear" was one of the idiotic but pardonable things my mother would say, in the hope of helping me to admire myself. And an odd thing happened. Sheltered as I was, I almost believed her.

ANDREA CHU/GETTY

Of course, my father could not do anything to prevent my coming home. And, of course, my presence, my existence, caused a monstrous rift between my parents. Though it's hard for me to believe that there had not always been some kind of rift—some incomprehension, at least, or chilly disappointment.

My father was the son of an uneducated man who owned a tannery and then a glove factory. Prosperity was ebbing as the twentieth century progressed, but the big house that my grandfather had built was still there, as were the cook and the gardener. My father had gone to college, joined a fraternity, had what was referred to as a high old time, then entered the insurance business when the glove factory went under. He was as popular around our town as he had been at college. A good golfer, an excellent sailor. (I have not mentioned that we lived on the cliffs above Lake Huron, in a Victorian house facing the sunset.)

At home, my father's most vivid quality was a capacity for hating and despising. Those two verbs often went together. He hated and despised certain foods, makes of automobiles, music, manners of speech and modes of dress, radio comedians, and, later on, television personalities, along with the usual assortment of races and classes it was customary to hate and despise in his day (though perhaps not as thoroughly as he did). In fact, most of his opinions would have found little opposition in our town, among his sailing companions or his old fraternity brothers. It was his vehemence, I think, that brought out an uneasiness that could also amount to admiration.

Calls a spade a spade. That was what was said of him.

Of course, a production like myself was an insult that he had to face every time he opened his own door. He took breakfast alone and did not come home for lunch. My mother ate those meals with me and part of her dinner also, the rest with him. Eventually, I think, there was some sort of row about this, and then she sat through my meal with me but ate with him.

It is clear that I did not contribute to a comfortable marriage.

But how had they ever come together? She had not gone to college; she'd had to borrow money to attend the school where teachers were trained in her day. She was frightened of sailing, clumsy at golf, and if she was beautiful, as some people have told me (it is hard to make that judgment of your own mother), her looks were not really of the kind that my father admired. He spoke of certain women as "stunners," or, later in his life, as "dolls." My mother did not wear lipstick, her brassieres were unassertive, her hair was done up in a tight crown of braids that emphasized her wide white forehead. Her clothes lagged behind the fashion, being somewhat shapeless and regal; she was the sort of woman you could imagine wearing a rope of fine pearls, though I don't think she ever did.

What I seem to be saying, I guess, is that I may have been a pretext, a blessing even, in that I furnished them with a ready-made quarrel, an insoluble problem that threw them back into their natural differences, where they may, in fact, have been more at ease. In all my years in our town, I encountered no one who was divorced, so it may be taken for granted that there were other couples living separate lives in one house, other men and women who had accepted the fact that there were words or acts that could never be forgiven, barriers between them never to be washed away.

It follows, unsurprisingly in such a story, that my father smoked and drank too much—though most of his friends did, too, whatever their situations. He had a stroke while still in his fifties, and died after several months in bed. And it was no surprise, either, that my mother nursed him through that time, kept him at home, where, instead of becoming tender and appreciative, he called her foul names, the syllables thickened by his misfortune but always decipherable to her, and to him, it seemed, quite gratifying.

At the funeral, a white-haired woman said to me, "Your mother is a saint." I disliked her instantly. I was at that time in my second year of college. I had not joined, or been invited to join, my father's fraternity. My friends were planning to be writers and actors, and were at present wits, dedicated time-wasters, savage social critics, and new-born atheists. I had no respect for people who behaved like saints. And, to be truthful, that was not what my mother aimed for, either. She was far enough from pious notions that she had never asked me, on any of my trips home, to go into my father's room and try for a word of reconciliation with him. My mother was no fool.

She had been devoted to me—not a word that either of us would have used, but I think the right one—till I was nine years old. She had taught me herself. Then she had sent me away to school. This sounds like a recipe for disaster. The mother-coddled purple-faced lad, thrown suddenly amid the taunts, the ruthless assaults, of young savages. But I didn't have a bad time, and to this day I'm not sure why. I was tall and strong for my age, and that may have helped. I think, though, that the atmosphere in our house, that climate of ill temper and ferocity and disgust coming from my often unseen father, must have made any other place seem reasonable, almost accepting. It was not a question of anybody's making an effort, being nice to me. There was a name for me—it was Grape-Nuts. But almost everybody had a derogatory nickname; a boy with particularly smelly feet that did not seem to benefit from daily showers cheerfully put up with the name Stink. I got along. I wrote my mother comical letters, and she replied somewhat in kind, taking a mildly mocking tone about events in town and at church—I remember her describing a row over the right way to cut sandwiches for a ladies' tea—and even managing to be humorous but not bitter about my father, whom she referred to as His Grace.

I have made my father the beast in my account so far, and my mother the rescuer and protector, and I believe this representation to be true. But, even before I left for school, they were not the only people in my story and the atmosphere in the house was not the only one I knew. What I have come to think of as the Great Drama of my life actually involved someone else.

Great Drama. It embarrasses me to have written that. I wonder if it sounds cheaply satirical or tiresomely self-aggrandizing. But then I think, Isn't it normal for me to see my life that way, to talk about it that way, when you consider how I chose to make my living?

I became an actor. Surprising? Of course, in college I hung around with people who were active in the theatre, and in my final year I directed a play. There was a standing joke, which I had originated, about how I could manage a role by always keeping my unmarked profile to the audience and walking backward across the stage when necessary. But no such drastic maneuvers were needed.

In those days, there were regular plays on national radio, and a particularly ambitious program on Sunday evenings. Adaptations of novels. Shakespeare. Ibsen. My voice was naturally flexible, and with a bit of training it improved. I got small parts at first. But, by the time television put the whole business to rest, I was on almost every week and my name was known to a certain faithful, if never large, audience.

Once acting was over for me, my voice stood me in good stead, and I was able to get a job as an announcer, first in Winnipeg, then back in Toronto. For the last twenty years of my working life, I was the host of an eclectic musical show presented on weekday afternoons. I did not choose the selections, as people often assumed. I have a limited appreciation of music. But I crafted an agreeable, slightly quirky radio personality. The program received many letters. We heard from old people's homes and homes for the blind, from people who regularly drove long or monotonous distances on business, from housewives alone in the middle of the day with the baking and the ironing, and from farmers in tractor cabs plowing or harrowing some sweeping acreage. All over the country.

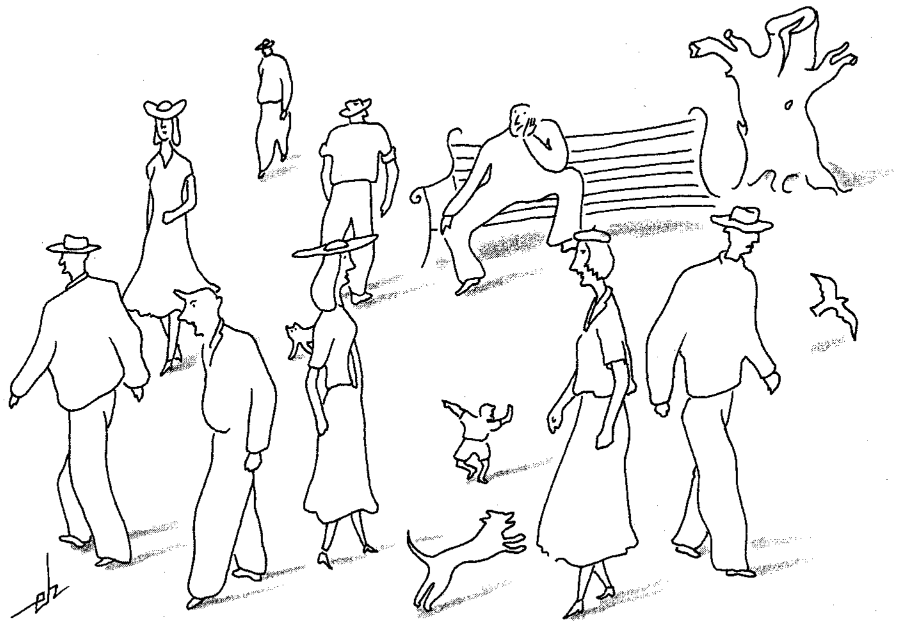
There was a flattering outpouring when I at last retired. People said they felt as if they had lost a close friend or member of the family. What they meant was that a certain amount of time had been filled for them, reliably, five days a week. They had not been left adrift, and for this they were truly, embarrassingly grateful. And, surprisingly, I shared in their emotion. I had to be careful not to choke up as I read some of the letters on the air.

And yet memory of the program, and of myself, faded rapidly. New allegiances were formed. I made a complete break, refusing to chair charity auctions or give nostalgic speeches. My mother had died a few years earlier, after living to a great age, but I had not sold the family house, only rented it out. Now I prepared to sell it, and gave the tenants notice. I decided to live there myself for the time it took to get the place—particularly the garden—into shape.

I was not lonely as an adult. In addition to my audience, I had friends. I had women, too. Some women, of course, specialize in the kind of men they imagine are in need of bucking up—they are eager to sport those men around as a sign of their own munificence. I was on the watch for them. The woman I was closest to in those years was a receptionist at the station, a nice, sensible person, who had been left on her own with four children. There was some indication that we would move in together, once the youngest was off her hands. But the youngest was a daughter, who managed to have a child of her own without ever leaving home, and somehow our expectation, our affair, dwindled. We talked on the phone after I retired and moved back to my old home. I invited her to visit. Then there was a sudden announcement that she was getting married and going to live in Ireland. I was too knocked off my perch to ask whether the daughter and the baby were going, too.

The garden is a great mess. Old perennials still straggle up among the weeds; ragged leaves larger than umbrellas mark the place of a sixty- or seventy-year-old rhubarb bed, and a half-dozen apple trees remain, bearing wormy little apples of some variety whose name I don't remember. The patches I clear look minute, yet the piles of weeds and brush I've collected are mountainous. They must, furthermore, be hauled away at my expense. The town no longer allows bonfires.

All this used to be looked after by a gardener named Pete. I have forgotten his last name. He dragged one leg after him and carried his head bent to one side. I don't know if he had had an accident, or suffered a stroke. He worked slowly but diligently and was more or less always in a bad temper. My mother spoke to him with soft-voiced respect, but he did not think much of her proposals for the flower beds. And he disliked me because I was constantly riding my tricycle where I shouldn't, and be-



NEXT TUESDAY AROUND TEN

cause he probably knew that I called him Sneaky Pete under my breath. I don't know where I got that. Was it from a comic strip?

Another possible reason for his growling dislike has just occurred to me, and it's odd that I didn't think of it before. We were both flawed, the obvious victims of physical misfortune. You would think that such people would make common cause, but it just as often happens that they don't. Each may be reminded by the other of something he'd sooner forget.

But I'm not sure that that was the case for me. My mother had arranged things so that most of the time I was seemingly quite unaware of my condition. She claimed that she was teaching me at home because of a bronchial ailment and the need to protect me from the onslaught of germs at school. Whether anybody other than me believed her I don't know. And, as for my father's hostility, that had so pervaded our house that I really don't think I felt singled out by it.

And here, at the risk of repeating myself, I must say that I think my mother did the right thing. The emphasis on my one notable flaw, the goading and ganging up, would have caught me too young and with nowhere to hide. Things are different now, and the danger to a child afflicted as I was would be of receiving too much fuss and showy kindness, not taunts and isolation. But the life of those times took much of its liveliness, its wit and its folklore, as my mother likely knew, from pure viciousness.

Until a couple of decades ago—maybe more—there was another building on our property, a small cottage where Pete stored his tools and where various things that had once been of use to us were put out of the way until some decision was made about what to do with them. It was torn down shortly after Pete was replaced by an energetic young couple, Ginny and Franz, who brought their own up-to-date equipment in their truck. Later, they went into market gardening, but by that time they were able to supply their teenage children to cut the grass, and my mother had lost interest in doing anything more.

But, to get back to the building—how I circle and dither around this subject—there was a time, before it became just a storage space, when people lived in it. First, there was a couple named the Bells, who were the cook-housekeeper and the gardener-chauffeur for my grandparents. My grandfather owned a Packard, which he never learned to drive. Both the Bells and the Packard were gone by my time, but the place was still referred to as Bells' Cottage.

For a few years in my childhood, Bells' Cottage was inhabited by a woman named Sharon Suttles, who lived there with her daughter, Nancy. She had come to town with her husband, a doctor who was setting up his first practice, and within a year or so he had died, of blood poisoning. She'd remained in town with her baby, having no money and, as was said, "no people." This must have meant no people who could help her or who had offered to take her in. At some point, she got a job in my father's insurance office, and came to live in Bells' Cottage. I am not certain about when this happened. How old was Nancy when I first knew her? Could she have been only three? Four, most likely. She was half a year younger than me. But I have no memory of them moving in, or of the cottage when it was empty. It was painted, at that time, a dusty pink, and I always thought of that as Mrs. Suttles's choice, as if she could not have lived in a house of any other color.

I called her Mrs. Suttles, of course. But I was aware of her first name, as I seldom was of any grownup woman's. Sharon was an unusual name in those days. And it had a connection with a hymn I knew from Sunday school, which my mother allowed me to attend because there was close monitoring and no recess. We sang hymns whose words were projected onto a screen, and I think that most of us, even before we learned to read, got some idea of the verses from their shape in front of us.

> By cool Siloam's shady rill
> How sweet the lily grows!
> How sweet the breath, beneath the hill,
> Of Sharon's dewy rose!

I can't believe that there was actually a rose in a corner of the screen, and yet I saw one—I see one—of a faded pink, whose aura was transferred to the name Sharon.

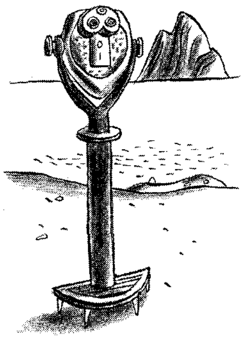
I don't mean to say that I fell in love with Sharon Suttles. I had been in love, when barely out of my infancy, with a tomboyish young maid named Bessie, who took me out on jaunts in my stroller and pushed me so high on the park swings that I nearly went over the top. And, sometime later, with a friend of my mother's, who had a velvet collar on her coat and a voice that seemed somehow related to it. Sharon Suttles was not the type one would fall in love with in that way. She was not velvet-voiced, and she had no interest in showing me a good time. She was tall and very thin for a mother—there were no slopes on her. Her hair was the color of toffee, brown with golden edges, and in the time of the Second World War she was still wearing it bobbed. Her lipstick was bright red and thick-looking, like that of the movie stars I had seen on posters, and around her house she usually wore a kimono, on which I believe there were some pale birds—storks?—whose legs reminded me of hers. She spent a lot of her time lying on the couch, smoking, and sometimes, to amuse us or herself, she would kick those legs straight up in the air, one after the other, and send a feathery slipper flying. When she was not mad at us, her voice was throaty and exasperated, not unfriendly but in no way tender or wise or reproving, with the full tones, the suggestion of sadness, that I expected in a mother.

"You dumb twerps," she called us.

"Get out of here and let me have some peace, you dumb twerps."

She would already be lying on the couch with an ashtray on her stomach, while we scooted Nancy's toy cars across the floor. How much peace did she want?

She and Nancy ate peculiar foods at irregular hours, and when she went into the kitchen to fix herself a snack she never came back with cocoa or graham crackers for us. On the other hand, Nancy was not forbidden to spoon vegetable soup out of the can, thick as pudding, or to grab handfuls of Rice Krispies straight from the box.



Was Sharon Suttles my father's mistress? With her job provided for her, and the pink cottage rent-free?

My mother spoke of her kindly, not infrequently mentioning the tragedy that had befallen her, with the death of her young husband. Whatever maid we had at the time was sent over with presents of raspberries or new potatoes or shelled peas, fresh from our garden. I remember the peas particularly. I can still see Sharon Suttles—lying on the couch—flipping them into the air with her forefinger, saying, "What am I supposed to do with these?"

"You cook them on the stove with water," I said helpfully.

"No kidding?"

As for my father, I never saw him with her. He left for work rather late and knocked off early, to keep up with his various sporting activities.

There were certainly days when Nancy's mother was not at home—not in her kimono on the couch—and it could be presumed that on those days she was not smoking or relaxing but doing regular work in my father's office, that legendary place that I had never seen and where I would certainly not be welcome.

At such times, a grouchy person named Mrs. Codd sat in the cottage kitchen, listening to radio soap operas and eating anything on hand. It never occurred to me that, since Nancy and I usually spent all our time together, my mother could have offered to keep an eye on her as well as me, or ask our maid to do so, to save the hiring of Mrs. Codd.

It does seem to me now that we played together all our waking hours. This would be from the time I was about five years old until I was around eight and a half. We played mostly outdoors—the days we spent in Nancy's cottage annoying her mother must have been rainy ones. We had to stay away from the vegetable garden and try not to knock down the flowers, but we were constantly in and out of the berry patches and under the apple trees and in the absolutely wild area beyond the cottage, which was where we constructed our air-raid shelters and hideouts from the Germans.

There was actually a training base to the north of our town, and real planes were constantly flying over us. And, because of all these reminders of the war, we chose to make of Pete not just a local enemy but a Nazi, and of his lawnmower a tank. Sometimes we lobbed apples at him from the crab-apple tree that sheltered our bivouac. One time, he complained to my mother, and it cost us a trip to the beach.

She often took Nancy with us to the beach. Not to the one with the waterslide, just down the cliff from our house, but to a smaller one that you had to drive to, where there were no rowdy swimmers or water-skiers. In fact, she taught us both to swim. Nancy was more fearless and reckless than I was, which annoyed me, so once I pulled her under an incoming wave and sat on her head. She kicked and held her breath and fought her way free.

"Nancy is a little girl," my mother scolded. "She is a little girl, and you should treat her like a little sister."

Which was exactly what I was doing. I did not think of her as weaker than me. Smaller, yes, but sometimes that was an advantage. When we climbed trees, she could hang like a monkey from branches that would not support me. And, in one fight, she bit me on my restraining arm and drew blood. That time, we were separated, supposedly for a week, but our glowering from windows soon turned into longing and pleading, and the ban was lifted.

In winter, we were allowed to roam the whole property, building snow forts stocked with sticks of firewood and arsenals of snowballs to fling at anyone who came along. Which few did, ours being a dead-end street. We had to make a snowman, just so that we could pummel him.

What about sex games, you may wonder. And, yes, we had those, too. I recall our hiding, one extremely hot day, in a tent that had been pitched—I have no idea why—behind the cottage. We had crawled in there on purpose to explore each other. The canvas had a certain erotic but infantile smell, like the underclothes that we removed. Various ticklings excited us, then made us cross, and we were soon drenched in sweat, itchy, and ashamed. When we got ourselves out of there, we felt more separate than usual and oddly wary of each other. I don't remember if the same thing happened again, with the same result, but I would not be surprised if it did.

I cannot bring Nancy's face to mind as clearly as I can her mother's. I think her coloring was, or would in time be, much the same. Fair hair, bleached by so much time in the sun, that would eventually go brown. Very rosy, even reddish, skin. Yes. I see her cheeks red, almost as if colored in crayon. That, too, owing to the time we spent outdoors, and to her decisive energy.

In my house, it goes without saying, all rooms except those specified to us were forbidden. We would not have dreamed of going upstairs or into the front parlor or the dining room. But in the cottage everywhere was allowed, and the cellar was a good place to go when even we tired of the afternoon heat. There was no railing alongside the cellar steps, and we could take more and more daring jumps to land on the hard dirt floor. And when we got bored with that we could climb into the old buggy and bounce up and down without springs, whipping an imaginary horse. Once, we tried to smoke a cigarette filched from Nancy's mother's pack. (We would not have dared take more than one.) Nancy managed better with it than I did, having had more practice.

There was also, in the cellar, an old wooden dresser, on which sat several tins of mostly dried-up paint and varnish, an assortment of stiffened paintbrushes, stirring sticks, and boards on which colors had been tried or brushes wiped. A few tins had their lids still on tight, and these we pried open, with some difficulty, and discovered paint that could be stirred to an active thickness. Then we spent time trying to loosen up the brushes by pushing them down into the paint and hitting them against the boards of the dresser, making a mess but not getting much of a result. One of the tins, however, proved to contain turpentine, which worked much better. Now we began to paint with those bristles that had become usable. I was eight by then, and could read and write to some extent, thanks to my mother. Nancy could, too, because she had finished the second grade.

"Don't look till I'm finished," I said to her, and pushed her slightly out of the way. I had thought of something to paint. She was busy anyway, smashing her own brush around in a can of red paint.

I wrote, "NAZI WAS IN THIS SELLEAR."

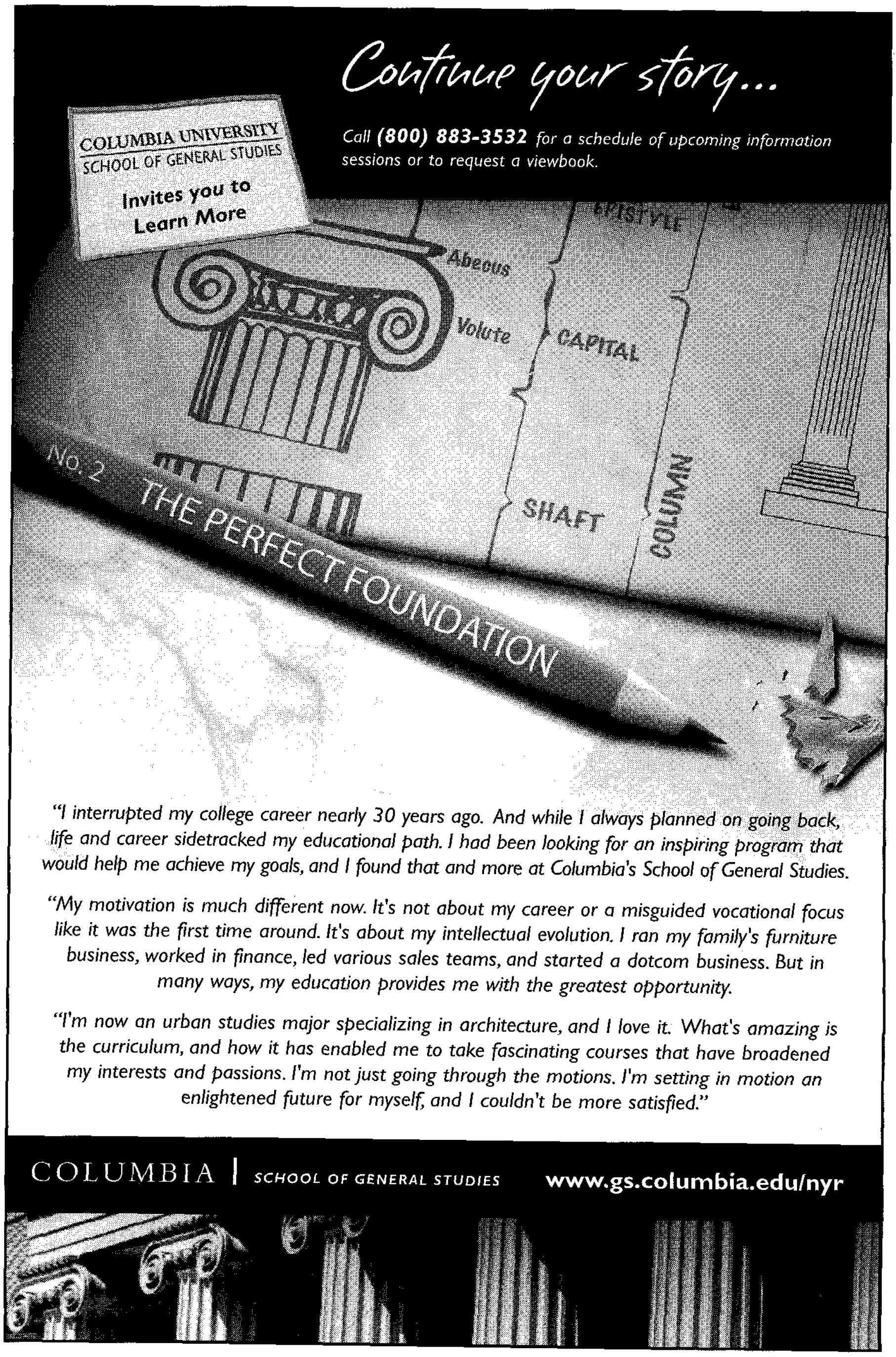
"Now look," I said.

She had her back to me and was wielding the paintbrush on herself.

She said, "I'm busy."

When she turned around, her face was generously smeared with red paint.

"Now do I look like you?" she cried,



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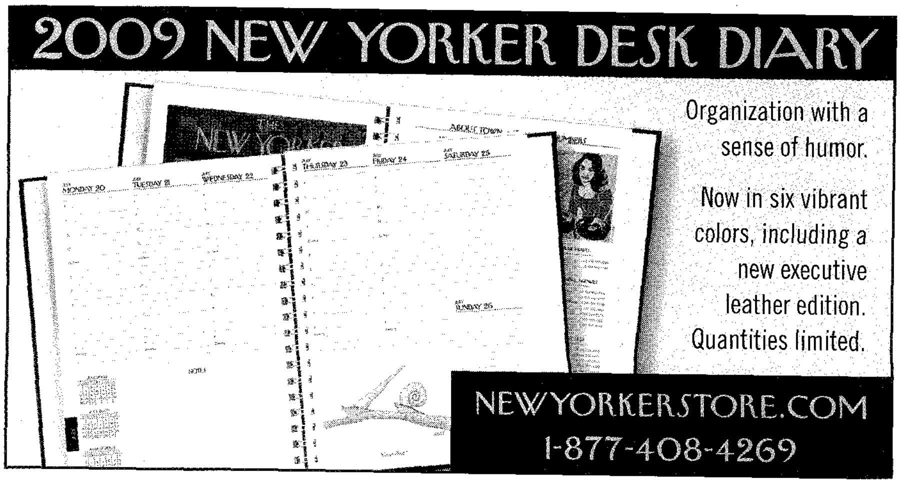
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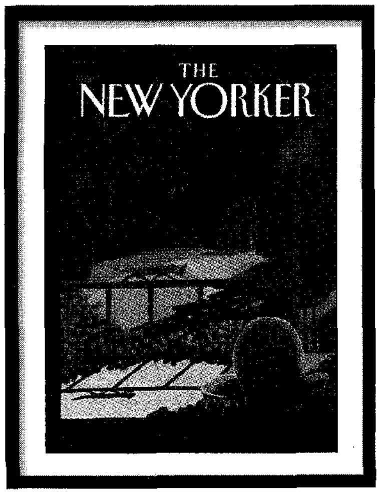

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drawing the brush down her cheek. "Now do I look like you?"

She was overjoyed, as if she had managed something magical, a radiant transformation. You'd have thought that this was something she'd been hoping for all her life.

Now I must try to explain what happened in the next several minutes.

In the first place, I thought she looked horrible.

I did not believe that any part of my face was red. And, in fact, it wasn't. The half of it that was colored was the usual mulberry birthmark color.

But this was not how I saw it in my mind. I believed my birthmark to be a soft brown color.

My mother had not done anything so foolish, so dramatic, as to ban mirrors from our house. But mirrors can be hung too high for a young child to see himself in them. That was certainly so in the bathroom. The only one in which I could readily see my reflection hung in the front hall, which was dim in the daytime and weakly lit at night. That must have been where I got the idea that half my face was a dull, mild sort of color, almost mousy, a furry shadow.

This was what I was used to, and what made Nancy's paint such an insult, a leering joke. I pushed her against the dresser as hard as I could and ran away from her, up the stairs. I think I was running to find a mirror, or even a person who could tell me that she was wrong. And, once that was confirmed, I could sink my teeth into pure hatred of her. I would punish her. I had no time, just then, to think how.

I ran through the cottage—Nancy's mother was nowhere to be seen, though it was Saturday—and out to the gravel, then the flagstone path between stalwart rows of gladioli. I saw my mother rise from the wicker chair where she sat reading on our back veranda.

"Not red," I howled with gulps of angry tears. "I'm not red." She came down the steps with a shocked face but, so far, no understanding. Then Nancy ran out of the cottage behind me, all garish and amazed.

My mother understood.

"You nasty little beast," she cried at Nancy, in a voice that I had never heard. A loud, wild, shaking voice. "Don't you come near us. Don't you dare. You are a bad, bad girl. You have no decent human kindness in you, do you? You never have been taught—"

Nancy's mother came out of the cottage then, with streaming wet hair in her eyes. She was holding a towel.

"Jeez, can't I even wash my hair around here—"

My mother screamed at her, too.

"Don't you dare use that language in front of my son and me—"

"Oh, blah-blah," Nancy's mother said immediately. "Just listen to you yelling your head off—"

My mother took a deep breath.

"I am—not—yelling—my—head off. I just want to tell your cruel child she will never be welcome in our house again. She is a cruel, spiteful, cruel child to mock my little boy for an accident of nature that he cannot help. You have never taught her anything, any manners. She did not even know enough to thank me when I took her with us to the beach—doesn't even know how to say please and thank you. No wonder, with a mother flaunting around in her wrapper—"

All this poured out of my mother as if there were a torrent of rage, of pain, of absurdity in her that would never stop. Even though by now I was pulling at her dress and saying, "Don't. Don't."

Then things got even worse, as tears rose and swallowed her words and she choked and shook.

Nancy's mother had pushed the wet hair out of her eyes and stood there observing.

"I'll tell you one thing," she said. "You carry on like this and they're going to take you to the loony bin. Can I help it if your husband hates you and you got a kid with a messed-up face?"

My mother held her head in both hands. She cried, "Oh—oh," as if pains were devouring her.

The woman who worked for us at that time—Velma—had come out on the veranda and was saying, "Missus. Come on, Missus." Then she raised her voice and called to Nancy's mother. "You go on. You go in your house. You scat."

"Oh, I will. Don't worry, I will. Who do you think you are, telling me what to do? And how do you like working for an ol' witch with bats in the belfry?" Then she turned on Nancy. "How the livin' Jesus am I ever going to get you cleaned up?" After that, she raised her voice again to make sure I could hear her. "He's a suck. Look at him hangin' on to his ol' lady. You're not ever going to play with him again. Ol' lady's suck."

All this time, Nancy was stricken. Not a sound out of her.

Velma on one side and me on the other, we tried to ease my mother back into the house. She had stopped making the terrible noise. She straightened herself and spoke in an unnaturally cheerful voice that would carry as far as the cottage. "Fetch me my garden shears, would you, Velma? While I'm out here, I might as well trim the glads. Some of them are downright wilted."

By the time she was finished, they were all over the path, not one standing, wilted or blooming.

All this must have happened on a Saturday, as I said, because Nancy's mother was there and so was Velma, who did not come on Sundays. By Monday, or maybe sooner, the cottage was empty. Perhaps Velma got hold of my father in the clubhouse or on the greens or wherever he was, and he came home, impatient and rude but soon compliant. Compliant, that is, about Nancy and her mother getting out. I don't think Nancy's mother would have made any fuss about leaving.

The fact that I would never see Nancy again dawned on me slowly. At first, I was angry with her and didn't care. Then, when I inquired about her, my mother must have put me off with some vague reply, not wanting to recall the anguished scene to me or herself. It was at that time that she became serious about sending me away to school and began looking around for a suitable place. She probably suspected that once I got used to being at a boys' school my memory of having had a female playmate would grow dim and seem unworthy, even ridiculous.

On the day after my father's funeral, my mother surprised me by asking if I would take her out to dinner (though, of course, she would really be the one taking me) at a restaurant some miles along the lakeshore.

"I just feel I've been penned up in this house forever," she said. "I need some air."

In the restaurant, she looked around discreetly and announced that there was nobody she knew.

"Will you join me in a glass of wine?" she said.

Had we driven all this way so that she could drink wine in public?

When the wine had come, and we had ordered, she said, "There's something I think you ought to know."

These may be among the most unpleasant words that a person ever has to hear. There is a pretty good chance that whatever you ought to know will be burdensome, and that in the telling of it there will be the suggestion that other people have had to bear that burden, while you have been let off lightly, all this while.

"My father isn't my real father?" I said. "Goody."

"Don't be silly. You remember your little friend Nancy?"

I actually did not remember, for a moment. Then I said, "Vaguely."

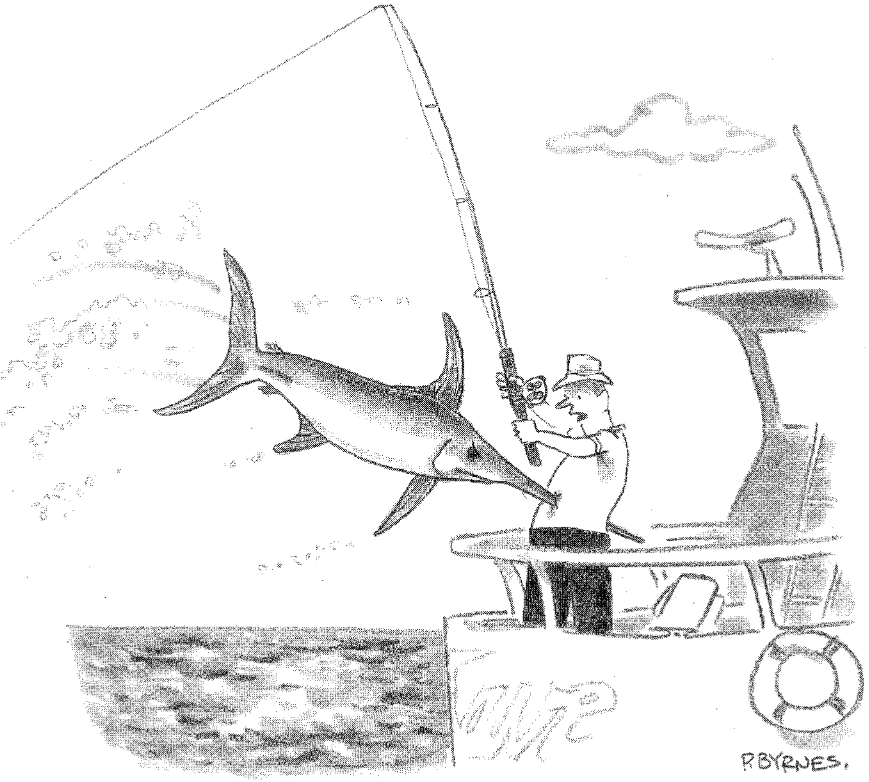
At this time, all my conversations with my mother seemed to call for strategy. I had to keep myself lighthearted, jokey, unmoved. In her voice and face was a lurking sorrow. She never complained about her own plight, but there were so many innocent and ill-used people in the stories she told me, so many outrages, that I was surely meant, at the very least, to go back to my friends and my lucky life with a heavier heart.

I would not coöperate. All she wanted, possibly, was some sign of sympathy, or maybe of physical tenderness. I would not grant that. She was a fastidious woman not yet contaminated by age, but I backed off from her as if she were harboring a contagious mold. I particularly backed off from any reference to my affliction, which, it seemed to me, she especially cherished—the shackle I could not loosen that had bound me to her from the womb.

"You would probably have known about it if you were at home," she said. "But it happened shortly after we sent you off to school."

Nancy and her mother had gone to live in an apartment that belonged to my father, on the Square. There, one bright fall morning, Nancy's mother had come upon her daughter in the bathroom, using a razor blade to slice into her cheek. There was blood on the floor and in the sink and here and there on Nancy. But she had not given up on her purpose or made a sound of pain.

How did my mother know all this? I can only suppose it was a town drama,



"Touché."

too gory, in the literal sense of the word, not to be related in detail.

Nancy's mother wrapped a towel around her and somehow got her to the hospital. There was no ambulance in our town at that time. She probably flagged down a car on the Square. Why didn't she phone my father? No matter—she didn't. The cuts were not deep and the blood loss was not so great, despite the splatter—there was no injury to any major blood vessel. Nancy's mother kept berating the child and asking if she was right in the head. "You're just my luck," she said. "A crazy kid like you."

"If there had been social workers around at that time," my mother said, "the poor little thing would have been made a ward of the Children's Aid."

"It was the same cheek," she said. "Like yours."

I had tried to keep silent, pretending not to know what she was talking about. But I had to speak.

"The paint was over her whole face," I said.

"Yes. But she was more careful this time. She cut just that one cheek. Trying the best she could to make herself look like you."

This time, I did manage to keep quiet.

"If she had been a boy, it would have been different," my mother said. "But what an awful thing for a girl."

"Plastic surgeons can do remarkable things nowadays."

"Oh, maybe they can."

After a moment, she added, "Such deep feelings children have."

"They get over that."

She said that she did not know what had become of them, the child or her mother. She was glad that I had never asked, because she would have hated to have to tell me anything so distressing, when I was still young.

I don't know what bearing it has on anything, but I have to say that my mother changed completely in her old age, becoming ribald and fanciful. She claimed that my father had been a magnificent lover and that she herself had been "a pretty bad girl." She announced that I should have married "that girl who sliced up her face," because neither of us would have been able to crow over the other about having done a good deed. Each of us, she cackled, would be just as much a mess as the other.

I agreed. I liked her then quite a bit.

A few days ago, I was stung by a wasp while clearing out some rotten apples under one of the old trees. The sting was on my eyelid, which rapidly swelled closed. I drove myself to the hospital, using the other eye (the afflicted one was on the "good" side of my face) and was surprised to be told that I had to stay overnight. The reason was that, once I was given an injection, both eyes would be bandaged, in order to avoid strain on the one that could see.

I had what they call a restless night, waking often. Of course, it is never really quiet in a hospital, and in that short time without my sight it seemed as if my hearing had grown more acute. When certain footsteps came into my room, I knew that they were those of a woman, and I had the feeling that she was not a nurse.

"Are you by any chance awake?" she said. "I'm your reader." I stretched out an arm, believing that she had come to read what are known as the vital signs.

"No, no," she said, in a small persistent voice. "I've come to read to you, if you'd like. Sometimes people get bored lying there with their eyes closed."

"Do they choose the reading matter, or do you?"

"They do. I carry a whole batch of things around with me."

"I like poetry," I said.

"You don't sound very enthusiastic."

I realized that this was true, and I knew why. I have some experience of reading poetry aloud, over the radio, and of listening to other trained voices, and there are some styles of reading I find pleasing, and some I abhor.

"Then we could have a game," she said, as if I had just explained this. "I could read you a line or two, then stop and see if you can do the next line. O.K.?"

It struck me that she might be quite a young person, anxious to get some takers, to be a success at this job.

I said O.K. But nothing in Old English, I told her.

"The king sits in Dunfermline town," she began, in a questioning voice.

"Drinking the blood-red wine," I chimed in, and we proceeded in good humor. She read well enough, though at a rather childlike speed. I began to enjoy the sound of my own voice, now and then falling into a bit of an actorly flourish.

"That's nice," she said.

"I will show you how the lilies grow, / On the banks of Italie."

"Is it grow or blow?" she said. "I don't actually have a book with that in. I should remember, though. Never mind, it's lovely. I always liked your voice on the radio."

"Really? Did you listen?"

"Of course. Lots of people did."

She stopped feeding me lines and just let me go ahead. You can imagine. "Dover Beach" and "Kubla Khan" and "West Wind" and "Wild Swans" and "Doomed Youth." Well, maybe not all of them, and not all the way to the end.

"You're getting short of breath," she said. Suddenly, her quick little hand was laid on my mouth. And then her face, or the side of her face, on mine. "I have to go. Here's just one more before I go. I'll make it harder by not starting at the beginning: 'None will long mourn for you, / Pray for you, miss you, / Your place left vacant—' "

"I've never heard that," I said.

"Sure?"

"Sure. You win."

By now, I suspected something. She seemed distracted, slightly cross. I heard the geese calling as they flew over the hospital. They take practice runs at this time of year, then the runs get longer, and one day they're gone. And then I was waking up, in that state of surprise, indignation, that follows a convincing dream. I wanted to go back and have her lay her face once more on mine. Her cheek on mine. But dreams are not so obliging.

When I could see again, and was at home, I looked for the lines she had left me with in my dream. I went through a couple of anthologies but did not find them there. I began to suspect that the lines did not belong to a real poem at all, but had just been devised in the dream, to confound me.

Devised by whom?

But later in the fall, when I was getting some old books ready to donate to a charity bazaar, a piece of brownish paper fell out of one of them, with lines on it written in pencil. It was not my mother's handwriting, and I hardly think it would be my father's. Whose, then? I don't know. Whoever it was had written the author's name at the end: Walter de la Mare. No title. And not a poet I have any particular knowledge of. But I must have seen the poem at some time, maybe not in this copy, maybe in a textbook. I must have buried the words in some deep cubbyhole of my mind. And why? Just so that I could be teased by them, or by a determined girl-child phantom, in a dream?

> There is no sorrow
> Time heals never;
> No loss, betrayal,
> Beyond repair.
> Balm for the soul, then,
> Though grave shall sever
> Lover from loved
> And all they share;
> See, the sweet sun shines,
> The shower is over,
> Flowers preen their beauty,
> The day how fair!
> Brood not too closely
> On love, on duty;
> Friends long forgotten
> May wait you where
> Life with death
> Brings all to an issue;
> None will long mourn for you,
> Pray for you, miss you,
> Your place left vacant,
> You not there.

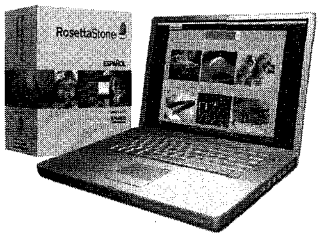
The poem didn't depress me. In some peculiar way, it seemed to back up the decision I had made by that time: not to sell the property but to stay.

Something had happened here. In your life there are a few places, or maybe only one place, where something has happened. And then there are the other places, which are just other places.

Of course, I know that if I had spotted Nancy years later—on the subway, for instance, in Toronto, both of us bearing our recognizable marks—we would in all probability have managed only one of those embarrassed and meaningless conversations, hurriedly listing useless autobiographical facts. I would have noted the mended, nearly normal cheek or the still obvious scar, but it would not have come into the conversation. Children might have been mentioned. Not unlikely, whether her face had been fixed or not. Grandchildren. Jobs. I might not have had to tell her about mine. We would have been shocked, hearty, dying to get away.

You think that would have changed things?

The answer is of course, and for a while, and never. ♦



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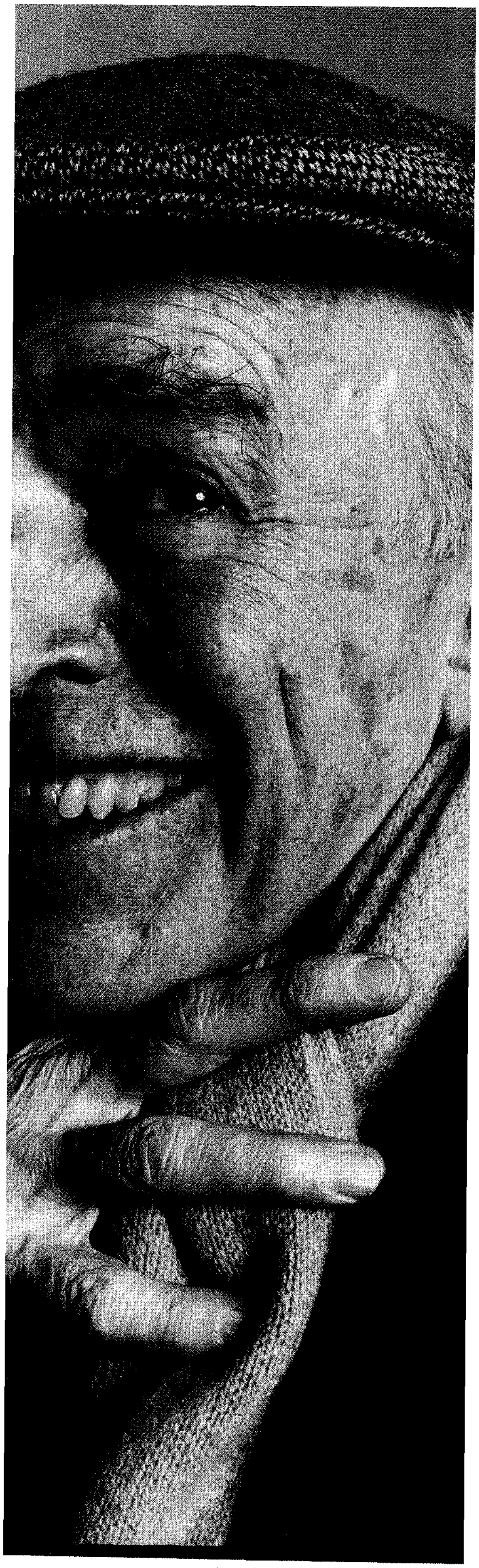
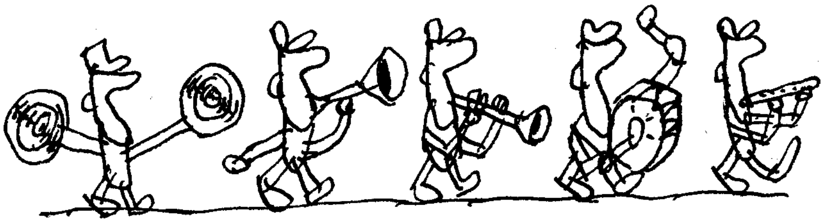


THE CRITICS



A CRITIC AT LARGE

IMPERISHABLE MAXWELL

The Library of America celebrates the novelist's centennial.

BY JOHN UPDIKE

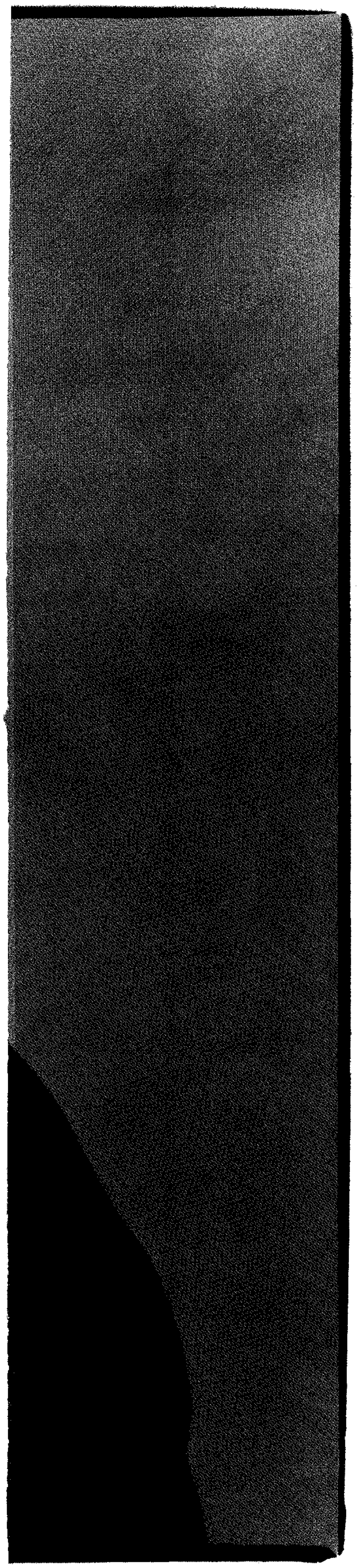
To those who knew him, William Maxwell as a person—soft-spoken yet incisive, moist-eyed yet dry-voiced, witty yet infallibly tactful—threatened to overshadow Maxwell as a writer. We aspiring authors who enjoyed his unstinting editorial attention and gracious company tended to forget that, for four days of the week, he stayed at home and wrote, reporting to the typewriter straight from breakfast, often clad in bathrobe and slippers. He had finished two novels, the second of them a Book-of-the-Month Club selection, before finding, in 1936, employment at *The New Yorker*, where he remained, with a few interruptions, as an editor until 1975; he continued as a contributor until 1999, when he was ninety-one years old and in his last year of life. Now his writing is what we still have of him, and it warms the heart to hold almost all of his fiction in two sizable, relatively imperishable Library of America volumes ($35 each), timed to be published a hundred years after his birth, in Lincoln, Illinois. The books have been scrupulously edited by Christopher Carduff; his "Note on the Texts" is exceptionally full, tracing Maxwell's earlier novels through their several revisions, and his twenty-nine pages labelled "Chronology" approach the intimacy and interest of a full-length biography. For the year 1945, for instance, we read:

> In June, Maxwell ends therapy with Reik, upon whose couch, he says, "the whole first part of my life fell away, and I had a feeling of starting again."

Three years later: "In fall 1948, Maxwell, dismayed by poor sales of new novel and by lack of enthusiasm at Harper's, returns to *The New Yorker* on part-time basis." Abrupt details supply, in Carduff's notes, a sense of drama largely absent from Barbara Burkhardt's stately, exegetical "William Maxwell: A Literary Life" (2005). Carduff's Chronology entry for 1950 reads:

> Struggles to imagine opening scene of book about France, but is undecided whether material would be better treated in first or third person, as fiction or as straightforward travel memoir. In fall he and Emily, after five years' trying to conceive a child, attempt to adopt, but Maxwell's age, 42, presents bureaucratic difficulties.

People already well acquainted with Maxwell's work will be fascinated to read, at the outset of the first Library of America volume—"Early Novels and Stories"—the author's first novel, "Bright Center of Heaven" (1934), which Maxwell, after a sold-out edition of a thousand volumes and a largely unsold second printing of another thousand, in effect suppressed. In 1958, when his new publisher, Alfred A. Knopf, undertook to reprint in its Vintage paperback line three earlier novels, Maxwell declined the offer to include "Bright Center of Heaven," finding it, upon rereading, "hopelessly imitative" and "stuck fast in its period." In a *Paris Review* interview, he said, "My first novel . . . is a com-



Maxwell in 1980: in novel after novel, he strove for "the line of truth exactly superimposed on the line of feeling." Photograph by Irving Penn.

ABOVE: BENOÎT JACQUES; OPPOSITE: © 1980 CONDÉ NAST PUBLICATIONS

pendium of all the writers I loved and admired." Virginia Woolf's "To the Lighthouse," especially, is imitated in the drifting weave of action and interior reflection, and in the rhythms, paced by commas, of the long descriptive sentences. Ten years after the novel's publication, he reread it and wrote, "I . . . discovered to my horror that I had lifted a character—the homesick servant girl—lock, stock, and barrel from 'To the Lighthouse.' " But these borrowings do not taint the peculiarly American innocence of the setting—Meadowland, an informal artists' colony in rural Wisconsin—or the indigenous ebullience borrowed from the Midwestern novelist Zona Gale. Meadowland was based upon Bonnie Oaks, a hospitable farm near Portage, Wisconsin, where Maxwell spent a number of summer months and one winter. Gale lived nearby, and, in many conversations, she shared with the young Maxwell her belief that artists should find "excitement in the presence of life" and bring out "the mysterious beauty of the commonplace" and the "brighter" aspect of reality.

Brightness is everywhere, indoors and out, in his first novel. With a confident empathy, the twenty-five-year-old author moves among a dozen residents and guests at the place. We partake of the interior sensations of the owner, a widow battling mental confusion, and of her two adolescent sons, and of a young woman sleeplessly coping with an unintended pregnancy, and of her oblivious, bookish lover, and of a crusty hired hand left over from the days when this was a serious farm, and of a concert pianist as she practices her drills, and of a painter wrestling with the abstract qualities of two oranges and an oil can, and of a "pestilential and garrulous youth" with no discernible artistic dedication, and of a homesick German cook, and of a sickly Southern spinster, and—the focus of the novel's suspense—of a Harvard-educated black lecturer, an ardent advocate of racial equality. Though critics have found fault with the black character, he seemed to me plausible and complex enough—the earliest of Maxwell's many honorable attempts to portray African-Americans.

"Bright Center of Heaven" gives those of us who knew him as the mature master of a deliberately low-key prose a new Maxwell—bolder, more overtly poetical, more metaphysical, and frequently surreal. The book's title comes from a bizarre vision entertained by Amelia, the racist Southern spinster, as she sits, stunned into muteness, at the dinner table with a black guest: "The candles soared toward a heaven of blue and white larkspur, and in the bright center of heaven Amelia saw a great black face with gold-rimmed glasses." Her sense of outrage finds another expression in her suddenly hearty appetite, where she has previously been a picky, invalid eater. Nothing is predictable at this social occasion, which ends when the black visitor, Jefferson Carter, batters his way out of a screened tent where the postprandial discussion, despite the liberal dispositions of the white participants, has irritated him into a rage. "These seven people," he thinks, "had no meaning beyond themselves, which was to say that they had no meaning at all. They did not express the life of the nation. They had no visible work. They were all drones and winter would find them dead."

The mural scale of the indictment (in an aggrieved mind) is one that Maxwell did not strive for again. The novel, though not long, is ambitious in the reach of its human diversity and the extravagance of its metaphors. Emotional nuances are reified into audible objects:

> "Merry sunshine, Amelia!" Mrs. West's voice flew toward her husband's half-sister like a volley of silver arrows, intending to undo with their brightness the work of years of indigestion. The arrows struck harmlessly against the breastplate and the helmet. They fell with a clatter at Amelia's feet.

A page later: "Amelia, too scandalized for speech, wrapped her disapproval round her and laid the folds of it at her feet." These overanimations are eddies in the "bright confusion" of this long day in the upper Midwest. Myth leaks into the humdrum: Whitey, the younger of Mrs. West's sons, "is the family Ariel." When Mrs. West takes a hurried hand in the preparation of lunch, "the air about her grew bright with the combat" and the cook surveys the mess in the kitchen "without expression save for the utterly dead look of one who sees her sons slain by the invader, her daughters violated, and her house pulled down about her head." A palpable modernist influence, aside from the subtle, quirky domestic realism of Woolf and E. M. Forster, is that of James Joyce, particularly of "Ulysses," which explodes as it progresses into a cosmic inclusiveness. A day in Dublin, a day in Wisconsin are alike sufficient samplings of humanity—random test cores plumbing the depths of existence. Homeric metaphors give epic magnitude to an eighteen-year-old boy's labor of unrequited love:

> As a mountain-climber is sometimes startled at the sight of one small flower growing miraculously out of the bare rock, and stops to gaze at its petals, white veined with blue, and at its yellow-and-blue center; and then the mountain-climber goes on up the precipitous wall of rock with less of weariness in his knees and a lighter pack on his back, so did the flower of Thorn's small hope refresh him and make the weight of his hurt feelings less burdensome to him.

An achieved and reciprocated love demands an even wider verbal stretch: "Beyond the shadow of all doubt she was certain that if he let go, if he took his hands from her face even for a second, she would fall headlong. She would be bruised and battered against ten thousand unnamed stars." The "heaventree of stars" that hangs over Leopold Bloom at day's end is glimpsed from another longitude.

In his next novel, "They Came Like Swallows" (1937), Maxwell subdues his figurative language to describe the most momentous event of his life: his mother's sudden death in the flu epidemic of 1918-19, after childbirth, at the age of thirty-seven. "My childhood came to an end at that moment," he later wrote. "The worst that could happen had happened, and the shine went out of everything." Modest specifics, clearly rendered, replace the sometimes florid style of the first novel. The voice and form did not come easily: Carduff's Chronology tells us, of the year 1935, "Plans autobiographical novel about death of his mother; writes seven drafts of the opening section but is happy with none of them." The work was completed with the help of the MacDowell Colony, in New Hampshire, and a patron in Urbana, who gave him, in exchange for grading papers, four dollars a month, room and board, and privacy. "Without this arrangement," he later said, "I doubt very much that the book would ever have been finished or that I would have continued to be a writer." He also credited his friend Robert Fitzgerald, the poet and translator, with persuading him that "life was tragic" and "literature was serious business." The novel is not simply

"We've decided that it will be better for his later development if we speak to him only in legalese."

autobiographical; the lies of fiction were employed to get at the nearly unbearable heart truth. Maxwell was ten when the flu seized his family and his mother died; his alter ego in the novel, Bunny, is eight. The subtracted two years sharpen the child's vulnerability and simplify his picture of events. He does not understand, for instance, that his mother is pregnant, even though other characters can see that she plainly is, and he has no grasp of pregnancy's timetable. Nor does the novel, divided into three parts, confine itself to his point of view; the actual death and its immediate aftermath are shown as perceived by Bunny's rough-and-tumble thirteen-year-old brother, Robert, and by his similarly masculine, unsympathetic father. If Bunny's section, titled "Whose Angel Child," is one of Maxwell's most brilliant transformations of memory, the next two, told from well beyond Bunny's point of view, testify to the author's powers of imagination.

Bunny, the angel child embodying the helpless infantile dependence upon maternal nurture that never totally leaves us, is, from his older brother's point of view, a tyrannical rival. When Robert prepares to say goodbye to their mother, who is heading off to what will prove to be a fatal hospital stay, "he started toward her, but Bunny was there first, tugging at her and sobbing wildly into her neck." As she comforts her younger son, her husband impatiently consults his watch, and Robert never does get to say his farewell. A few minutes later, Bunny is busy courting the good will of his new caretaker, Aunt Clara:

> Although his face was streaked with tears, Bunny was pleased with himself. Robert recognized the symptoms. And he saw that Bunny was making up to Aunt Clara—starting up the stairs in front of her as if she were the one person that he liked and depended on. Just as he did to Irene, or to Sophie, or to anybody who happened to be around and could get him what he wanted.

In the third section, the briefest, Clara returns Bunny to his grief-stricken father, James Morison, and the tearful child looms as a puzzling responsibility; he tells him, "There, there. You mustn't, son. You mustn't take on so. You'll be sick," and struggles "with the large buttons on the child's coat." Having determined in his daze of grief to sell the house and give the children to one of their aunts, so "there would be no trace . . . anywhere" of his dead wife, Elizabeth, he "turned to the doorway, and saw Bunny staring at him with Elizabeth's frightened eyes." The network of family connection reclaims him.

The social context of these private events is never lost sight of; the novel is not only about the mother's death but about Aunt Irene's broken marriage, and Robert's amputated leg, and the pious unction of Aunt Clara and her husband, Wilfred. Irrelevancies, including the terms of the First World War armistice, keep intruding. In the depths of his sorrow, "James caught a glimpse of a pocket knife: Wilfred was going to pare his finger nails." The widower wanders out into the snowy midnight, where the bizarre apparition of Crazy Jake the local junk collector making his rounds comes to James as a revelatory call back to life. The novel, like its predecessor, is somewhat supernatural; human awareness animates the inanimate ("All the lines and surfaces of the room bent toward his mother, so that when he looked at the pattern of the rug he saw it necessarily in relation to the toe of her shoe") and comforts the bereaved with intimations of a persisting ghost.

Novel after novel, the reconciliation of art and actuality continued to present stimulating difficulties for Maxwell. In describing, in this magazine, his friend the poet Louise Bogan, upon her death, in 1970, he said, "In whatever she wrote, the line of truth was exactly superimposed on the line of feeling": such an exacting superimposition represented his ideal. It was Bogan who, when, in 1940, he showed her a short story about two boys who meet at the school swimming pool, suggested that what he had written was the first chapter of a novel. As he worked for more than four years on the novel, she provided her responses to each new installment and at the end gave the work in progress its eventual title, "The Folded Leaf" (1945). Carduff's "Note on the Texts" relates that Maxwell in 1943 was "still struggling with the material" so noticeably that *The New Yorker* gave him five months' leave at full pay so that he could finish up; even then, it took several more drafts.

The core of the recalcitrant material was the second most traumatic event of his young life: he attempted suicide at the age of nineteen, while a sophomore at the University of Illinois. According to Carduff's Chronology, Maxwell had been courting a professor's daughter, Margaret Guild, and he introduced her to his Chicago high-school friend Jack Scully. When Jack and Margaret became lovers, Maxwell later recounted, "I thought I didn't want to live any more and cut my throat and wrists with a straight-edged razor." As the novel describes it, it is not the girl but the male friend whose defection pushes the slight, physically underdeveloped protagonist, Lymie Peters, into despair. In "The Folded Leaf" Maxwell describes, with a candor then rare in American fiction, homosexual passion. Swimming-pool and locker-room nudity leads to frenzied tussling, a bawdy frat initiation, a shared bed, a relationship anxiously servile on one side and gruffly commanding on the other, and, in the culminating reconciliation, a kiss on the lips. Though the physical beauty of the gruff partner, Spud, is repeatedly extolled, no description of physical interaction is more graphic than this:

> Lymie slept on his right side and Spud curled against him, with his fists in the hollow of Lymie's back. In five minutes the whole bed was warmed and Spud was sound asleep. It took Lymie longer, as a rule. He lay there, relaxed and drowsy, aware of the cold outside the covers and of the warmth coming to him from Spud, and Spud's odor, which was not stale or sweaty or like the odor of any other person. Then he moved his right foot until the outer part of the instep came in contact with Spud's bare toes, and from this one point of reality he swung out safely into darkness, into no sharing whatever.

Looking back, with more than a year of psychoanalysis with Theodor Reik behind him, Maxwell ascribed his suicide attempt to reading too much Walter de la Mare, which gave him a "poetic idea of life after death," a life in which he would be reunited with his mother. A debonair note penned from his hospital bed readily accepted a female fellow-student's invitation to a dance and referred to his attempt as "having failed to discover whether the moon really was made of green cheese." But the italicized section in "The Folded Leaf," in which Lymie recalls swallowing iodine and then, as his stomach ache recedes, trying to slash his way through his blood's insistent congealing, is the most harrowing page Maxwell ever wrote. Shirley Hazzard, in her eloquent tribute to Maxwell after his death, thought that his near-suicide was "a spectral presence in Bill's equilibrium and in his greatest pleasures."

Bogan's advice to make a novel of his vignette of two boys meeting in a swimming pool led him, it may be, to pad the slender basic story with too many details of college life and ruminations, influenced by Frazer's "Golden Bough," on tribal rites. His brave leap into sexual honesty was achieved with little assistance from his British models; Forster vaguely urged the male principals of "A Passage to India" to achieve Anglo-Indian connection, but left his novel about a homosexual affair, "Maurice," unpublished at his death, and Virginia Woolf transmuted her androgyny into the mannered ingenuities of "Orlando."

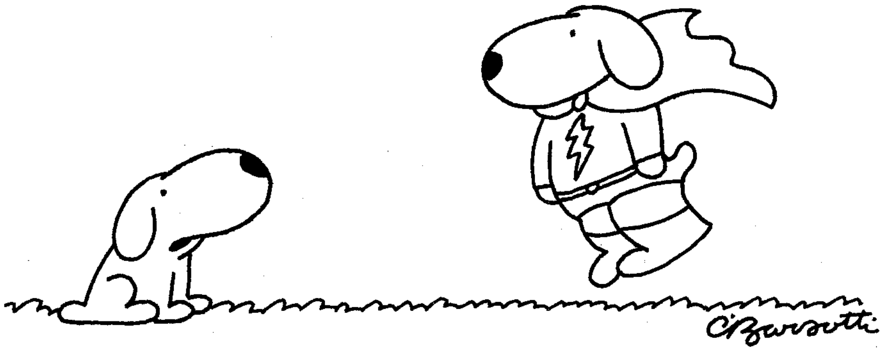
In 1945, the same year that "The Folded Leaf" was published—in a healthy total of two hundred thousand copies—Maxwell married Emily Gilman Noyes, a recent Smith graduate who had come to *The New Yorker* to interview for a possible job. She was, as those of us who knew them remember, his beautiful counterpart, with equally luminous dark eyes and the same enchanted aura of a truly rare creature. They died a week apart, after fifty-five years of marriage. As the first fruit of his happiness, Maxwell began writing a novel for which Emily provided the title, "Time Will Darken It" (1948). It was not easy to work at it while carrying on his editorial duties, but it flowed:

> I seemed to have no more choice about this than one has about the background of a dream. . . . A set of characters seized me, and ran off with me. My function was simply to record what they said and did, rather than shape the goings on.

The events take place in a house just like Maxwell's childhood home, and deal with men and women based upon his kin, from Illinois and Mississippi. There is no character, no Bunny or Lymie, who can be readily identified with the author. An unprecedented reliance on dialogue, and the interjections of an exceptionally relaxed narrator, move the plot smoothly along. The plot is not easy to remember; there is a stove explosion in it, induced by kerosene, and a baby, but "the mysterious beauty of the commonplace" blurs individual incidents. Maxwell (who once said to me, "Plot, shmot") was ready to dispense with the contrivances of fiction altogether.

The second Library of America volume, "Later Novels and Stories," shows Maxwell the person and Maxwell the writer becoming indistinguishable. It opens with the long anti-novel "The Château" (1961), based closely upon a trip to France that he and Emily took in 1948. A very thinly disguised couple, Harold and Barbara Rhodes, encounter the felicities and opacities of a foreign language and society. An appended section, "Some Explanations," rather impudently offers to clear up a few mysteries: "But if you really want to know why something happened, if explanations are what you care about, it is usually possible to come up with one. If necessary, it can be fabricated." The book gave him no end of trouble, though its inspiration—a tribute to the beauty of France and his happiness there—was instant: a preface to a later edition of "The Château" declared that, upon returning to America, "with my hat still on my head [I] sat down to my typewriter and wrote a page of notes for a novel. . . . For the next ten years I lived in my own private France, which I tried painstakingly to make real to the reader. It was my way of not coming home." He filled a carton with "unreadable" versions and enlisted the sometimes chastening advice of friends like Frank O'Connor, the Irish short-story writer, and Francis Steegmuller, the eminent scholar and translator from the French.

Maxwell's long period of painstaking struggle included his move from Harper & Brothers, then the usual publisher for *New Yorker* contributors, to Alfred A. Knopf, at the founder's invitation. Knopf's editor-in-chief, Harold Strauss, didn't much like the novel and wanted the second part cut, and might have prevailed had not Knopf himself intervened, genially telling his new author, "Have it whatever way you want." The book was assigned to the editor Judith Jones, a kindred spirit who edited Maxwell's volumes for Knopf until his death. "The Château" continued to give him trouble even after its publication. One difficulty, which had inhibited its writing, concerned the possible reaction of the French family portrayed in its gossamer fiction. He refused



"Fetching faster than a speeding bullet is still fetching."

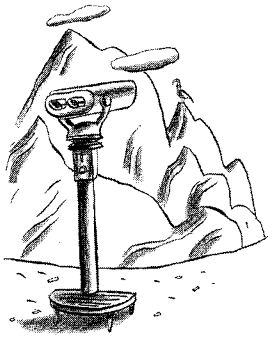
to let the book be published not only in France but in England, because "English books would get across the channel so easily." Nevertheless, his French friends did eventually discover the book, and one of its purported victims, who figured in it as a deaf old lady, told him, not unkindly, when, later, he visited her in Paris, "You were very naughty to write that book. Because you didn't speak French, you didn't understand things." Her son-in-law, overhearing this remark, contradicted it, saying, "He got everything right." Yet when, later still, Maxwell attempted to obtain the family's permission to publish the book in France, word came back "No, not now. Not ever."

It is good to be reminded, upon rereading, how delicious and dead-on "The Château" is. All the embarrassments and gratifications of European travel are preserved in the amber of Maxwell's much pondered, seemingly casual prose. How familiar is the intimidating breakfast that greets the Rhodeses on their first morning in the handsome but chilly château, near Blois, which has been converted to a guesthouse:

> Talking in subdued tones, they discovered the china pitcher of coffee under a quilted cozy, and, under a large quilted pad, slices of bread that were hard as a rock and burned black around the edges from being toasted over a gas burner. The dining-room windows offered a prospect of wet gravel, long grass bent over by the weight of the rain, and dripping pine branches. The coffee was tepid.

It is 1948. Sugar is still rationed; war damage is still evident; blackout paper lingers on some of the château's windows; bicycles, cigarettes, and Citroëns are in short supply. France is wounded and poor and (a word that keeps cropping up in considerations of Maxwell) vulnerable. The Rhodeses in their innocence are in the first wave of tourists, and Harold, alternately ecstatic and wary, begins "to feel as if an unlimited amount of kindness had been deposited somewhere to his account and he had only to draw on it." He worries why this is, asking his hostess, "Are French people always kind and helpful to foreigners?" Rather hypochondriacally, he wonders how they would have been received had they come before the Marshall Plan was announced, but reassures himself that "the kindness he had met with everywhere was genuine." Harold is thirty-four, six years younger than Maxwell was in 1948, while Barbara is about Emily's age, the mid-twenties. The youthful intensity that Harold brings to even momentary relationships was a recognizable trait of his creator, who tells us of his hero:

> On meeting someone who interests him he goes toward that person unhesitatingly, as if this were the one moment they would ever have together, their one chance of knowing each other. . . . He lets the other person know, by the way he listens, by the sympathetic look in his brown eyes, that he wants to know everything; and at the same time the other person has the reassuring suspicion that Harold Rhodes will not ask questions it would be embarrassing to have to answer. He tries to attach people to him, not so that he can use them or so that they will add to his importance but only because he wants them to be a part of his life.



As if to relate more closely to the reader, to attach him or her more tightly to him, Maxwell grew increasingly impatient with the disguises and falsifications—the pretenses—of fiction. The busily omniscient modernist author of "Bright Center of Heaven" and "They Came Like Swallows" becomes, in the "Some Explanations" section of "The Château," a postmodern exponent of unknowability: we are mysteries to one another, and an honest narrative retains its puzzles. His novella "So Long, See You Tomorrow" (1980) is the triumphant culmination of this approach, winning Maxwell—whose distinctive career had been unduly shy of awards—the Howells Medal from the American Academy of Arts and Letters, for the best novel of the previous five years. In his amusing acceptance speech, Maxwell made much of the fact that the box handed him, ostensibly containing the medal, was in fact empty, a precaution taken because at a previous occasion a freshly presented medal had been accidentally dropped and damaged. With a similarly disarming admission, he announced to the reader that the central story of "So Long, See You Tomorrow"—a vivid tale, based on childhood memories and a few photostatted stories from the local newspaper, of farm-country adultery, leading to double separation, murder, and suicide—was a fabrication:

> If any part of the following mixture of truth and fiction strikes the reader as unconvincing, he has my permission to disregard it. I would be content to stick to the facts if there were any.

On an early page, he calls his work a "memoir—if that's the right name for it." Maxwell knew, slightly and briefly, the boy identified as Cletus Smith, a son of the murderer; years after the scandal he spotted him in the corridor of a big Chicago high school and, shocked by surprise, said nothing to him. This failure haunted him; he never saw Cletus again. Giving this confession a context, he tells the reader the personal story already reflected in his fiction—his mother's death, the dishevelment of grief that followed, and the move with his father and stepmother to Chicago, leaving the idyll of his boyhood in Lincoln behind. This basic autobiography is imparted with a fresh stylistic firmness, a bluntness not possible when his near kin were alive, and a note of grievance not struck before: why did nobody protect him from the brutal bullying by stronger children to which he was subjected as a delicate child? Why did neither his father nor his older brother talk to him about his mother's death? He describes his inability to master the piano, which his omni-competent father played with ease and pleasure, as "a small plot of ground on which I could oppose my father without being actively disobedient." His music teacher, we learn, was the go-between for the love letters his father received from the woman who became his second wife, and his son was enlisted to deliver them; he retrospectively marvels at this. As young teen-agers, he and Cletus, now living in Lincoln with his mother, meet to play, a bit dangerously, in the open framework of the new house that Maxwell's father is building on the edge of town, an emblematic framework that the narrator, now an elderly New York sophisticate, rediscovers in Alberto Giacometti's sculpture "The Palace at 4 A.M.," at the Museum of Modern Art.

In the tragic romance that Maxwell, in our plain sight, invents, he shows, for a boy reared in a small city, a persuasive feel for the hard daily life of tenant farmers in the black-earth countryside around Lincoln; the bleak tale-within-a-tale of friendship and love gone miserably awry earns him a place as a prairie novelist in the naturalist Midwestern vein of Willa Cather and Hamlin Garland. The editors at *The*

New Yorker, which printed "So Long, See You Tomorrow" in two installments, objected to the articulated thoughts of a dog, Trixie, belonging to Cletus's family, but Maxwell, as with the second section of "The Château," got his way. The dog's thoughts, which are not complex, are one with his creator's lifelong habit of personifying furniture, objects, and rooms, sometimes giving them words to speak, within the wide discourse of things that present themselves to human awareness. His tender anthropomorphism here descends even upon a lowly ant, as Cletus "with a stick . . . drew crosses in the dirt, making life difficult for an ant who had business in that patch of bare ground."

The fault, if any, with "So Long, See You Tomorrow" lies in the device of the self-conscious, conspicuously confiding author: when the author becomes the main character, the other characters appear secondary, and their actions and decisions become ripples within the central feat of storytelling itself. Cletus hardly exists compared with the boy the narrator once was; remembering the two boys testing their equilibrium in the half-built house, Maxwell writes, "It occurs to me now that he was not very different from an imaginary playmate." When he searches his high-school yearbook for any image or mention of Cletus, he finds none, as if the character were fictional after all. The contract between writer and reader, which calls for a willing suspension of disbelief, has been quietly abrogated. When the author casts off his cloak of invisibility, and a novel is no longer (as Stendhal put it) "a mirror that strolls along a highway" but one that strolls down Memory Lane, he stands in front of the curtain either as a memoirist or as a fabulist exulting in the magic of make-believe; Maxwell in his shorter late works was now one and then the other.

Those already well acquainted with Maxwell's work will surely find something new and delightful in the forty fabulous "improvisations" that the editor has assembled from the twenty-one that Maxwell included in "All the Days and Nights: The Collected Stories of William Maxwell" (1995) and nineteen published in sundry places between 1957 and 1999. The earliest of them all, "The Woodworker," was written in 1946, as a Christmas present for Emily. In a National Public Radio interview in 1995, he explained the genesis of this improvisatory mode:

> Actually, they began because my wife liked to have me tell her stories when we were in bed in the dark before we were falling asleep. And I didn't know where they came from, but I just said whatever came into my head and sometimes I would fall asleep in the middle of a story and she would shake me and say, "What happened next?" And I would struggle back into consciousness and tell her what happened next. And then I began to write them for occasions for Christmas and birthdays. . . . And I would sit down at the typewriter and empty my mind entirely and see what came out on the typewriter, and something always did. And from the first sentence a story just unfolded.

His time in psychoanalysis possibly contributed to such easy and trusting access to the wellsprings of narration; certainly the tales, in their playful fairy-tale manner, tap into his deepest sensations and moral convictions, with no hint of preachiness. The last three in the volume, for instance—"The Dancing," "The Education of Her Majesty the Queen," and "Newton's Law"—are moving parables of marital fidelity, of altruism, and of death's heavy approach, respectively. There is a sparkle to these fairy tales that reminds us of "Bright Center of Heaven," with its rueful comedy of brightness. Whereas Maxwell, according to Carduff's Chronology, before embarking on his book-length essay about his family history in "Ancestors" (1971), reread E. B. White for stylistic inspiration, his fables suggest Thurber's, and Thurber's faux-medieval children's books, fleshed out with a novelist's superior interest in human circumstances.

Maxwell's sublimely diffident and benign little essay "Nearing Ninety" touches on the pleasures of remembering:

> I have liked remembering almost as much as I have liked living. But now it is different, I have to be careful. I can ruin a night's sleep by suddenly, in the dark, thinking about some particular time in my life. Before I can stop myself, it is as if I had driven a mineshaft down through layers and layers of the past and must explore, relive, remember, reconsider, until daylight delivers me.

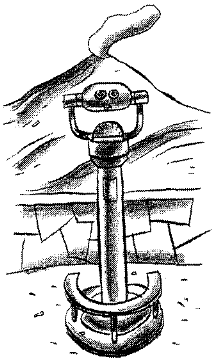
"A Final Report" (1963), inventorying the estate of Aunty Donald, a female neighbor who used to carry the author as a frail infant on a pillow, was the first short story that posed as a reminiscence and called the fictional Draperville Lincoln. He said, "I found I could use the first person without being long-winded or boring, and at the same time deal with experiences that were not improved by invention of any kind." Pieces of fiction closely portraying his father and his older brother followed—the latter, "A Game of Chess," signed with the pseudonym Gifford Brown to protect his brother's feelings. The marvellous very short story "Love" (1983) commemorated Miss Vera Brown, his fifth-grade teacher, whom all her students loved, and who died of tuberculosis at the age of twenty-three. The longer "Billie Dyer" (1989) drew liberally upon historical research in its portrait of a Lincoln black man who became a prominent physician in Kansas City and appeared as one of Ten Most Distinguished Men in Lincoln's centennial pageant, in 1953. The story gave its title to a collection of memoirs, including among the subjects Maxwell's father's friends, his mother's brother Ted, his own brother Hap as a child, and William Dyer's sister Hattie, who had cared for Maxwell's Grandmother Blinn and then worked for the Maxwells for five years. In the story "The Front and the Back Parts of the House," Maxwell tells how, on a return visit home, he found Hattie in his Aunt Annette's kitchen and impulsively put his arms around her: "There was no response. Any more than if I had hugged a wooden post." He later traced the snub to an invented black drunk, in "Time Will Darken It," whom Hattie took as a portrait of her husband. He was not, but Maxwell did believe, ever more strongly, that reality was the best fiction. In that same recollection, he says in an aside that even when the author imposes the disguise of a name on characters, actual names "are so much more convincing than the names he invents for them." Apropos of "Billie Dyer," he told an interviewer, "For me, 'fiction' lies not in whether a thing, the thing I am writing about, actually happened, but in the form of the writing . . . a story, which has a shape, a controlled effect, a satisfying conclusion—something that is, or attempts to be, a work of art."

He lived for art, its appreciation as well as its creation. In "Nearing Ninety," he likened death to lying down for a pleasant afternoon nap and found "unbearable" only the thought that "when people are dead they don't read books." His shapely, lively, gently rigorous memoirs, out of the abundance of heartfelt writing he bestowed on posterity, are most like being with Bill in life, at lunch in midtown or at home in the East Eighties, as he intently listened, and listened, and then said, in his soft dry voice, exactly the right thing. ♦

BRIEFLY NOTED

The 19th Wife, *by David Ebershoff (Random House; $26).* This ambitious third novel tells two parallel stories of polygamy. The first recounts Brigham Young's expulsion of one of his wives, Ann Eliza, from the Mormon Church; the second is a modern-day murder mystery set in a polygamous compound in Utah. Unfolding through an impressive variety of narrative forms—Wikipedia entries, academic research papers, newspaper opinion pieces—the stories include fascinating historical details. We are told, for instance, of Brigham Young's ban on dramas that romanticized monogamous love at his community theatre; as one of Young's followers says, "I ain't sitting through no play where a man makes such a cussed fuss over *one* woman." Ebershoff demonstrates abundant virtuosity, as he convincingly inhabits the voices of both a nineteenth-century Mormon wife and a contemporary gay youth excommunicated from the church, while also managing to say something about the mysterious power of faith.

Twenty Fragments of a Ravenous Youth, *by Xiaolu Guo (Nan A. Talese; $21.95).* Guo's début novel, first published eleven years ago in China and now reworked in English, distills the rush to modernization through the experience of Fenfang, a young peasant who leaves her village for Beijing. Part of the post-Cultural Revolution generation, Fenfang is untethered from history and profoundly alone, and Guo imbues her flailing efforts to establish herself with a raw, adolescent pain. Pirated books and DVDs provide an education, as Fenfang takes cues from "Betty Blue," "Chungking Express," Marguerite Duras, and Tennessee Williams, progressing from work as an extra in state film productions to a screenwriting career. Guo is a filmmaker herself, and, if her recurrent homages occasionally cloy, Fenfang's rage to express herself carries an unmistakable autobiographical intensity. The book establishes a theme of spiritual estrangement and homesickness that has persisted in Guo's subsequent output.



The Girl from Foreign, *by Sadia Shepard (Penguin Press; $25.95).* In this elegantly crafted memoir, the author sets out to fulfill her grandmother's dying wish that she learn about her heritage. Her grandmother grew up among the Bene Israel, a small Jewish community in India; when she married a Muslim, she left Judaism and, eventually, India, and adopted the name Rahat Siddiqi. Shepard herself is the product of a mixed marriage: her mother is Pakistani and Muslim, her father American and Christian. After receiving a Fulbright, she left her life in the U.S. to document the remaining Indian Jews, whose numbers have steadily dwindled as many emigrate to Israel. Shepard's eagerness to maintain narrative tension leads to occasional artificiality, but her writing is vivid and her meditations on heritage and grief are moving.

Anonymity, *by John Mullan (Princeton; $22.95).* In England, the use of the word "anonymous" to describe a literary work dates only from the sixteenth century, but by the end of the eighteenth seventy per cent of all novels were published "in secret." Mullan traces the flourishing of the practice in this detailed history, arguing that concealment was only rarely the aim. Anonymity and pseudonymity might be invoked out of fear or diffidence: in 1555, one punishment for treasonous writings was the loss of the right hand; "modest" women authors were long identified simply as "A Lady." But anonymity could also incite interest: Jonathan Swift constructed elaborate hoaxes, "more promotional than shy," to veil his authorship of "Gulliver's Travels," and the guessing game surrounding the true identity of Currer Bell, the professed author of "Jane Eyre," was such that, in its first year of publication, reviews outnumbered copies sold.

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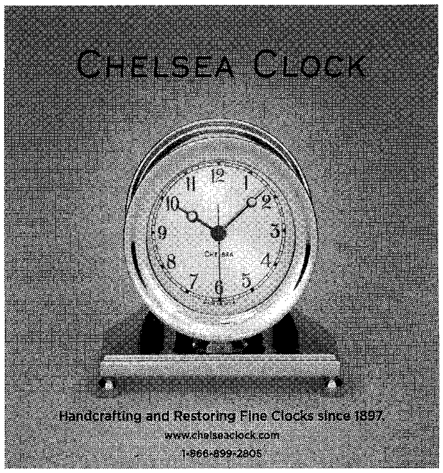

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BOOKS

THE HOMECOMING

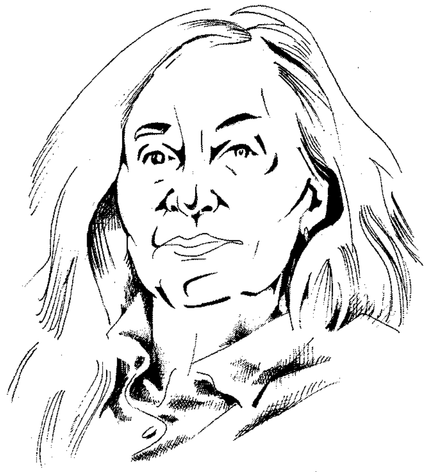
A prodigal son returns in Marilynne Robinson's third novel.

BY JAMES WOOD

Growing up in a religious household, I got used to the sight of priests, but I always found them at once fascinating and slightly repellent. The funereal uniform is supposed to obliterate the self in a shroud of colorlessness, even as it draws enormous attention to the self; humility seems to be cut from the same cloth as pride. Since the ego is irrepressible—and secular—it tends to bulge in odd shapes when religiously straitened. The priests I knew practiced self-abnegation but had perfected a quiet dance of ego. They were modest but pompous, gentle but tyrannical (one of them got angry if he was disturbed on a Monday, the vicar's day off), pious but knowing. Most were good men, but the peculiar constrictions of their calling produced peculiar opportunities for unloosing.

This is probably one of the reasons—putting the secular antagonism of novelists aside—that in fiction priests are usually seen as comical, hypocritical, improperly worldly or dangerously unworldly, or a little dim. Another reason is that fiction needs egotism, vanity, venality, in order to produce drama and comedy; we want our sepulchres craftily whited. The seventy-six-year-old Reverend John Ames, who narrates Marilynne Robinson's second novel, "Gilead," is gentle, modest, loving, and above all good. He is also a bit boring, and boring in proportion to his curious lack of ego. At home in the Iowa town of Gilead, in the mid-nineteen-fifties, and aware of his imminent demise, he writes a long letter to his seven-year-old son, which is presented as a series of diary entries. (Georges Bernanos's novel "Diary of a Country Priest" seems to have been one model.) Mellowly resigned, tired but faithful, he is a man who can serenely exclaim "How I have loved this life!" or inform us that he has written more than two thousand sermons "in the deepest hope and conviction." The reader may roll his eyes at this, and perhaps think of Fielding's Parson Adams, in "Joseph Andrews," who tries to pawn his sermons, and who falls into argument with another parson about who is the better writer. Fielding seems closer to the human case, and more novelistically vivid.

But Robinson skirted this potential objection by making her novel swerve away from the traditionally novelistic. Ames's calm, grave diary entries contain almost no dialogue, shun scenes, seem to smother conflict before it has taken a breath. Very beautifully, "Gilead" becomes less a novel than a species of religious writing, and Ames's entries a recognizable American form, the Emersonian essay, poised between homily and home, religious exercise and naturalism:



Marilynne Robinson

PAUL HAMLYN

> This morning a splendid dawn passed over our house on its way to Kansas. This morning Kansas rolled out of its sleep into a sunlight grandly announced, proclaimed throughout heaven—one more of the very finite number of days that this old prairie has been called Kansas, or Iowa. But it has all been one day, that first day. Light is constant, we just turn over in it. So every day is in fact the selfsame evening and morning. My grandfather's grave turned into the light, and the dew on his weedy little mortality patch was glorious.

The result was one of the most unconventional conventionally popular novels of recent times.

Robinson describes herself as a liberal Protestant believer and churchgoer, but her religious sensibility is really far more uncompromising and archaic than this allows. Her essays, a selection of which appeared in "The Death of Adam" (1998), are theologically tense and verbally lush in a manner that is almost extinct in modern literary discourse, and which often sounds Melvillean. She is a liberal in the sense that she finds it difficult to write directly about the content of her belief, and shuns the evangelical childishness of gluing human attributes onto God. She writes that as a child she "felt God as a presence before I had a name for him," and adds that she goes to church in order to experience "moments that do not occur in other settings." In a way that many Americans, and certainly her liberal readers, would find palatable, her Protestantism seems born of a love of religious silence—the mystic, quietly at prayer in an unadorned place, indifferent to ecclesiastical mediation.

But Robinson is illiberal and unfashionably fierce in her devotion to this Protestant tradition; she is voluble in defense of silence. She loathes the complacent idleness whereby contemporary Americans dismiss Puritanism and turn John Calvin, its great proponent, into an obscure, moralizing bigot: "We are forever drawing up indictments against the past, then refusing to let it testify in its own behalf—it is so very guilty, after all. Such attention as we give to it is usually vindictive and incurious and therefore incompetent." We flinch from Puritanism because it placed sin at the center of life, but then, as she tartly reminds us, "Americans never think of themselves as sharing fully in the human condition, and therefore beset as all humankind is beset." Calvin believed in our "total depravity," our utter fallenness, but this was not necessarily a cruel condemnation. "The belief that we are all sinners gives us excellent grounds for forgiveness and self-forgiveness, and is kindlier than any expectation that we might be saints, even while it affirms the standards all of us fail to attain," Robinson writes in her essay "Puritans and Prigs." Nowadays, she argues, educated Americans are prigs, not Puritans, quick to pour judgment on anyone who fails to toe the right political line. Soft moralizing has replaced hard moralizing, but at least those old hard moralists admitted to being moralists.

I do not always enjoy Robinson's ecstasies, but I admire the obdurateness with which she describes the difficult joys of a faith that will please neither evangelicals nor secularists. Above all, there is the precision and lyrical power of her language, and the way it embodies a struggle—the fight with words, the contemporary writer's fight with the history of words and the presence of literary tradition, the fight to use the best words to describe both the visible and the invisible world. Here, for instance, is how the narrator of "Housekeeping," Robinson's first novel, describes her dead grandmother, who lies in bed with her arms wide open and her head flung back: "It was as if, drowning in air, she had leaped toward ether." In the same novel, the narrator imagines her grandmother pinning sheets to a clothesline, on a windy day—"Say that when she had pinned three corners to the lines it began to billow and leap in her hands, to flutter and tremble, and to glare with the light, and that the throes of the thing were as gleeful and strong as if a spirit were dancing in its cerements." "Cerements," an old word for burial cloth, is Robinson in her Melvillean mode, and is one of many moments in her earlier work when she sounds like the antiquarian Cormac McCarthy. But stronger than that fancy word is the plain and lovely "the throes of the thing," with its animism and its homemade alliteration.

Her new novel, "Home" (Farrar, Straus & Giroux; $25), begins simply, eschewing obvious verbal fineness, and slowly grows in luxury—its last fifty pages are magnificently moving, and richly pondered in the way of "Gilead." "Home" is not a sequel to that novel but more like that novel's brother, since it takes place at the same narrative moment and dovetails with its happenings. In "Gilead," John Ames's great friend is the Reverend Robert Boughton, a retired Presbyterian minister (Ames is a Congregationalist). The two men grew up together, confide in one another, and share a wry, undogmatic Protestantism. But where Ames married late and has only one son, Boughton has eight children, one of whom, Jack, is a prodigal son. In the earlier novel, Ames frets over Jack (now in his forties), who has been difficult since he was a schoolboy: there has been petty theft, drifting, unemployment, alcoholism, and an illegitimate child, now deceased, with a local woman. Jack walked out of the Boughton home one day and stayed away for twenty years, not returning even for his mother's funeral. After all that time, we learn, Jack has unexpectedly returned. In the last part of "Gilead," Jack comes to Ames for a blessing—for the blessing he cannot get from his own father—and spills a remarkable secret: he has been living with a black woman from Memphis named Della, and has a son with her.

"Home" is set in the Boughton household at the time of Jack's sudden return, and is an intense study of three people: the Reverend Boughton, the old, dying patriarch; his pious daughter Glory; and the prodigal Jack. Glory has her own sadness: she has come back to Gilead after the collapse of what she took to be an engagement, to a man who turned out to be married. Like Princess Marya in "War and Peace," who does daily battle with her father, the old Prince Bolkonsky, she is the dutiful child who must submit to the demands of an aging tyrant. She is fearful of Jack, whom she hardly knows, and is in some ways envious of his rebellious freedom. Robinson evokes well the drugged shuffle of life in a home dominated by the routines of an old parent: how the two middle-aged children hear "a stirring of bedsprings, then the lisp lisp of slippered feet and the pock of the cane." There are the imperious cries—for help getting dressed; a glass of water—and the hours distracted by the radio, card games, Monopoly, meals, pots of coffee. The very furniture is oppressive, immovable. The numerous knickknacks are displayed only "as a courtesy to their givers, most of whom by now would have gone to their reward." For Glory, who is in her late thirties, there is the dread that this will be her final home:

> What does it mean to come home? Glory had always thought home would be a house less cluttered and ungainly than this one, in a town larger than Gilead, or a city, where

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> someone would be her intimate friend and the father of her children, of whom she would have no more than three.... She would not take one stick of furniture from her father's house, since none of it would be comprehensible in those spare, sunlit rooms. The walnut furbelows and carved draperies and pilasters, the inlaid urns and flowers. Who had thought of putting actual feet on chairs and sideboards, actual paws and talons?

Much of "Home" puzzles out the mystery of Jack Boughton's rebellion, his spiritual homelessness. From his earliest years, he had seemed a stranger to his relatives. The family had been waiting for him to walk out, and he did, and then this story became their defining narrative: "They were so afraid they would lose him, and then they had lost him, and that was the story of their family, no matter how warm and fruitful and robust it might have appeared to the outside world." Even now that he has returned, Glory reflects, there was "an incandescence of unease about him whenever he walked out the door or, for that matter, whenever his father summoned him to one of those harrowing conversations. Or while he waited for the mail or watched the news." In the course of the book, we discover a little of what he has been doing in those twenty years away—as in "Gilead," we learn about the early illegitimate child, and about his eight-year relationship with Della, herself a preacher's daughter.

Jack is a suggestive figure—a highly literate nonbeliever who knows his Bible backward but finds it hard to do theological battle with his slippery father. Back home, he dresses formally, putting on his threadbare suit and tie, as if to do his reformed best; but he has a perpetually wary expression and a studied politesse that suggest an existential exile. He tries to conform to the habits of the childhood home—he tends the garden, does the shopping, fixes up the old car in the garage—but almost every encounter with his father produces a tiny abrasion that smarts and festers. The novel quietly mobilizes the major Biblical stories of father and son: Esau, denied his birthright, begging for a blessing from his father; Joseph, reunited, finally, with his father, Jacob; the Prodigal Son, most loved because most errant.

What propels the book, and makes it ultimately so powerful, is the Reverend Boughton, precisely because he is not the soft-spoken sage that John Ames is in "Gilead." He is a fierce, stern, vain old man, who wants to forgive his son and cannot. He preaches sweetness and light, and is gentle with Jack, like a chastened Lear ("Let me look at you for a minute," he says), only to turn on him angrily. There are scenes of the most tender pain. Robinson, so theologically obsessed with transfiguration, can transfigure the most banal observation. In the attic, for instance, Glory finds a chest of her father's shirts, ironed "as if for some formal event, perhaps their interment"; and then the novelist, or poet, notices that the shirts "had changed to a color milder than white." (Those cerements again.) Father and son clash while watching television news reports of the racial unrest in Montgomery. Boughton swats away his son's anger with his bland, milky prophecy: "There's no reason to let that sort of trouble upset you. In six months nobody will remember one thing about it."

As the old man palpably declines, an urgency sets in. The imminence of death should conduce to forgiveness, but the father cannot allow it. He knows that his son has not returned for good. "He's going to toss the old gent an assurance or two, and then he's out the door," he complains. Nothing will change, because the family situation rests on a series of paradoxes, which interlock to imprison father and son. Jack's soul is homeless, but his soul is his home, for, as Jack tells his sister, the soul is "what you can't get rid of." He is condemned to leave and return. If the prodigal son is the most loved because most errant, then it is his errancy that is secretly loved: perhaps a family needs to have its designated sinner? Everyone longs for restoration, for the son to come home and become simply good, just as everyone longs for Heaven, but such restoration, like Heaven itself, is hard to imagine, and in our lack of imagination we somehow prefer what we can touch and feel—the palpability of our lapses.

Behind all of Robinson's work lies an abiding interest in the question of heavenly restoration. As she puts it in "Housekeeping," there is a law of completion, requiring that everything "must finally be made comprehensible. . . . What are all these fragments for, if not to be knit up finally?" But will this restoration ever be enough? Can the shape of the healing possibly fit the size of the wound? You see a version of this concern in "Home," in the way the novel ponders the question of return. The Boughton children come home to a strange, old-fashioned Iowa town, but the return is hardly the balm it promises to be, for home is too personal, too remembered, too disappointing. Eden is exile, not Heaven:

> And then their return to the *pays natal,* where the same old willows swept the same ragged lawns, where the same old prairie arose and bloomed as negligence permitted. Home. What kinder place could there be on earth, and why did it seem to them all like exile? Oh, to be passing anonymously through an impersonal landscape! Oh, not to know every stump and stone, not to remember how the fields of Queen Anne's lace figured in the childish happiness they had offered to their father's hopes, God bless him.

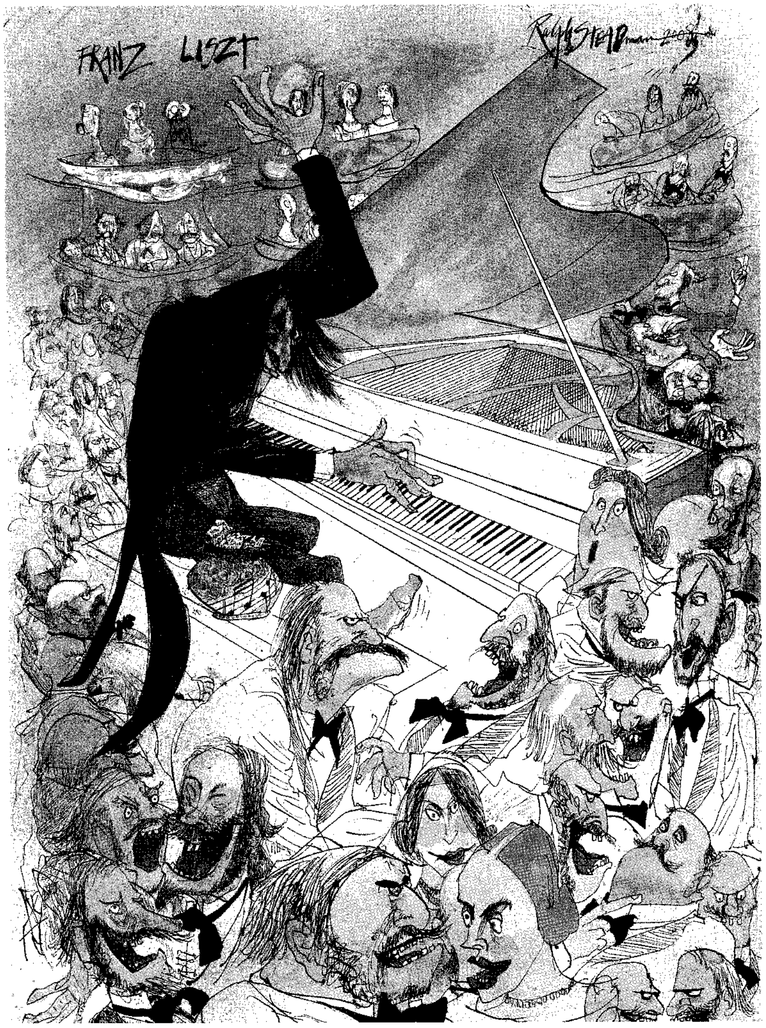
So old Boughton is dying, and nothing changes. "What I'd like to know is why you didn't love us," he petulantly chides his son. "That is what has always mystified me." He continues a little later, "You see something beautiful in a child, and you almost live for it, you feel as though you would die for it, but it isn't yours to keep or to protect. And if the child becomes a man who has no respect for himself, it's just destroyed till you can hardly remember what it was." Early in the novel, the Reverend seemed to want his son to call him something other than the customary, rather estranged "sir"—Papa or even Dad. Late in the novel, when Jack calls him Dad, he bursts out, "Don't call me that. I don't like it at all. Dad. It sounds ridiculous. It's not even a word." When he is not rebuking his son, he is complaining about old age: "Jesus never had to be old." He is calm only when asleep: "His hair had been brushed into a soft white cloud, like harmless aspiration, like a mist." In a final encounter of devastating power, Jack goes to his father to tell him that he is going away again. Jack puts out his hand. "The old man drew his own hand into his lap and turned away. 'Tired of it!' he said." They are the last words that the Reverend Boughton says to Jack, an angry inversion of the last, tired words of the serene John Ames in "Gilead": "I'll pray, and then I'll sleep." ♦

MUSICAL EVENTS

WHY SO SERIOUS?

How the classical concert took shape.

BY ALEX ROSS



Concerts and opera once served as a playground for the aristocracy.

RALPH STEADMAN

The modern classical-music performance, as audiences have come to know it and sometimes to love it, adheres to a fairly rigid format. The music usually begins a few minutes after eight, listeners having taken their seats beforehand to peruse program notes or chat with neighbors. The evening falls into two halves, each lasting around forty-five or fifty minutes. An orchestral concert often proceeds from overture or short tone poem to solo concerto, and then to a symphony or some other major statement; a solo recital builds up to a big sonata or a virtuoso showpiece. The audience is expected to remain quiet for the duration of each work, and those who applaud between movements may face embarrassment. Around ten o'clock, the audience claps for two or three minutes, the performers bow two or three times, and all go home. Opera has a slightly looser code—the length of the evening depends on the composer's whims, and the audience makes its feelings known with sporadic applause and very occasional boos—but there, too, an atmosphere of high seriousness prevails.

Most people are aware that this clockwork routine—reassuringly dependable or drearily predictable, depending on whom you ask—is of recent origin, and that before 1900 concerts assumed a quite different form. It's always a shock, though, to confront the difference in all its particulars. Two new books, Kenneth Hamilton's "After the Golden Age: Romantic Pianism and Modern Performance" (Oxford; $29.95) and William Weber's "The Great Transformation of Musical Taste: Concert Programming from Haydn to Brahms" (Cambridge; $99), explore how and why the classical ritual has changed, augmenting a literature of concert sociology that also includes Lawrence Levine's "Highbrow/Lowbrow," James Johnson's "Listening in Paris," and several chapters of Richard Taruskin's "Oxford History of Western Music." Here is Johnson's evocation of a night at the Paris Opéra in the years before the French Revolution:

> While most were in their places by the end of the first act, the continuous movement and low din of conversation never really stopped. Lackeys and young bachelors milled about in the crowded and often boisterous parterre, the floor-level pit to which only men were admitted. Princes of the blood and dukes visited among themselves in the highly visible first-row boxes. Worldly abbés chatted happily with ladies in jewels on the second level, occasionally earning indecent shouts from the parterre when their conversation turned too cordial. And lovers sought the dim heights of the third balcony—the paradise—away from the probing lorgnettes.

In other words, the opera served mainly as a playground for the aristocracy. The nobles often possessed considerable musical knowledge, but they refrained from paying overt attention to what the musicians were doing. Indeed, silent listening in the modern sense was deemed déclassé. Johnson quotes a nobleman writing, "There is nothing so damnable as listening to a work like a street merchant or some provincial just off the boat."

Public concerts didn't become widespread until after 1800, and well into the nineteenth century they took the form of "miscellanies"—eclectic affairs at which all kinds of music were played before audiences that seldom sat still or quieted down. Movements of symphonies and concertos were mingled with solo-piano pieces, songs and arias, dances and other lighter items. Applause usually erupted after movements, and at times during them, if the audience heard something it particularly liked. William Weber de-

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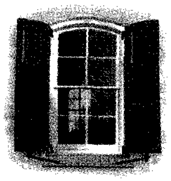

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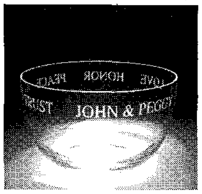

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scribes a Viennese concert in 1865—featuring the Strauss-family orchestra and the Prussian Royal Hussars' band—that paired excerpts from Wagner's "Tristan und Isolde" with a male vocal quartet singing "What Girls Do to Logic." Concerts varied in length and took place at odd hours. At a Berlioz event in Paris in 1833, the music began at fifteen minutes before midnight and ended well after one in the morning.

Piano recitals were, by modern standards, completely nuts. Hamilton, in his deft, sympathetic account of the old-school virtuosos and their gaudy habits, devotes several amusing pages to the antics of the great Franz Liszt, who was the first pianist to break from the miscellany format and give concerts on his own, although the ensuing spectacle resembled "The Ed Sullivan Show" more than the hushed recital of today. In one favorite routine, Liszt brought onstage a large urn into which his listeners had dropped slips of paper, each one inscribed with a suggestion for a tune on which he might improvise. He then drew out the messages one by one, taking delight in those which wandered off topic. Hamilton writes, "On turning out the urn in a concert on March 15, 1838 in Milan, Liszt found a piece of paper with the question 'Is it better to marry or remain single?'—to which he slickly replied, 'Whatever course one chooses, one is sure to regret it.' Written on another scrap he found the words 'the railroad'—which he illustrated on the keyboard with a swath of glissandi."

The audience sometimes participated without any prompting from the stage. Once, when Liszt was beginning a performance of the "Kreutzer" Sonata with the violinist Lambert Massart, listeners began calling out "Robert le Diable!"—meaning that they wished to hear instead Liszt's fantasy on themes from the Meyerbeer opera. Liszt acceded to the demand and launched into his "Robert" fantasy. Imagine what would happen today if, just as Maurizio Pollini was playing the first of Chopin's Études, concertgoers were to shout, " 'Claire de Lune'! 'Claire de Lune'!"

What changed? The historians point their fingers at the middle classes. With the aristocracy declining in the wake of the French Revolution and subsequent upheavals, the bourgeoisie increasingly took control of musical life, imposing a new conception of how concerts should unfold: programs favored composers of the past over those of the present, popular fare was banished, program notes provided orientation to the uninitiated, and the practice of milling about, talking, and applauding during the music subsided. To some extent, these changes can be explained in anthropological terms: by applauding here and not applauding there, the bourgeois were signalling their membership in a social and cultural élite. As Johnson points out, they felt obliged to reconfirm that status from year to year, since, unlike the aristocrats of yore, they lived in fear of going back down the ladder. "The bourgeoisie isn't a class, it's a position," the *Journal des Débats* advised. "You acquire it, you lose it." Attending concerts became a kind of performance in itself, a dance of decorum.

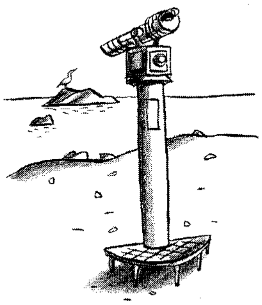
Yet the "great transformation," as Weber calls it, wasn't simply an exercise in making concerts as stuffy as possible. Many latter-day analysts have lamented what is often called the "sacralization" of classical music, but Weber defends, to a degree, the much maligned middle classes. He observes that the new mentality pointedly rejected aristocratic values, which relegated serious artistic strivings to the background. To program an entire Beethoven symphony was in many cases an idealistic act, even a subversive one; musicians were striking a blow on behalf of the rights of the "self-willed individual," in Weber's words, with Beethoven heroically representing all those who yearned for basic human liberties. And the music itself demanded a change. When Beethoven began his Ninth Symphony with ten bars of otherworldly pianissimo, he was defying the norms of his time, essentially imagining a new world in which the audience would await the music in an expectant hush. Soon enough, that world came into being.

One turning point came in 1807, with a pair of concerts at the Leipzig Gewandhaus, a hall converted from a textile merchants' building. Beethoven's "Eroica" was played, less than two years after its première. A week later, "by demand," the symphony had an encore. The first time, it opened the program, with miscellaneous fare ensuing (works of Federici, Schneider, and Naumann). The second time, the "Eroica" ended the evening, with Mozart and more Beethoven preparing the way. The idea of the curated program—of the concert as intellectual journey—was beginning to take hold. In 1836, Liszt, amid his variety-show escapades, ventured the entire "Hammerklavier" Sonata in Paris, while Clara Wieck, around the same time, played all three movements of the "Appassionata" in Vienna, provoking, Hamilton tells us, "intense debate."

Even those who look back nostalgically to the wild old days—Hamilton, an accomplished Scottish pianist, contrasts the showmanship of Liszt with the "sheer routine and funereal boredom" of many recitals he hears today—will be wary of reviving the habits of 1750 or 1800. Large tracts of the repertory of the past two hundred years would be unimaginable in that world: Debussy could never have disclosed the fragile epiphanies of "The Afternoon of a Faun" before a chattering audience, and Mahler's catch-all symphonies would lose their dramatic momentum if they were chopped into bleeding fragments. The other night, at the Mostly Mozart Festival, the cellist Anssi Karttunen joined the City of Birmingham Symphony to play "Notes on Light," a gently ravishing piece by the Finnish composer Kaija Saariaho. The work ends with the cellist hovering ethereally around the notes B and F-sharp, trilling and bowing near the bridge or the fingerboard. The following night, during a performance of Mozart's Clarinet Concerto, the clarinettist Kari Kriikku chose a whisperingly soft dynamic for the second iteration of the main theme of the Adagio. Both nights, the audience added to the spell by making no sound. Neither effect would have registered in the Paris of 1750.

Credit the bourgeoisie, then, for enabling new kinds of expression. But there was a downside to the middle-class revolution, as Weber unblinkingly shows in his book. For years, he has been gathering data on late-eighteenth- and nineteenth-century performances, and he summarizes his findings in graphs showing how works of dead composers came to dominate concerts in Paris, London, Leipzig, and Vienna. In 1782, in Leipzig, the percentage was as low as eleven. By 1830, it was around fifty, going as high as seventy-four in Vienna. By the eighteen-sixties and seventies, the figure ranged from sixty-nine to *ninety-four* per cent (in Paris). Matters progressed to the point where a Viennese critic complained that "the public has got to stay in touch with the music of its time . . . for otherwise people will gradually come to mistrust music claimed to be the best," and organizers of a Paris series observed that some of their subscribers "get upset when they see the name of a single contemporary composer on the programs." These quotations come from 1843 and 1864. Anyone who believes that twentieth-century composers, with their harsh chords and rhythms, betrayed some sacred contract with the public should spend a few moments absorbing Weber's data. In fact, the composers were betrayed first.

When the concert rite emerged in its perfected form, circa 1950—the ban on applauding after movements took hold only in the early twentieth century, almost certainly prompted by the passivity of home listening—it seemed to elevate and to stifle the music in equal measure. Composers were empowered by the worshipfulness of the proceedings, but, generally, only if they were dead. Performers thrived on the new attentiveness, but struggled against the monkish strictures of conservatory training and certain inexplicable regulations governing behavior and dress. (The overarching problem of classical music is the tuxedo.) Listeners, too, come away feeling both liberated and confined. James Johnson identifies what he calls "the paradox of bourgeois individualism"—a culture of conformity encircling an art of untrammelled personal expression.



Yet the concert has not stopped evolving. Indeed, in the past decade or so the long reign of the eight-to-ten, symphony-after-intermission affair has weakened. This summer, I've seen a Bang on a Can marathon that resembled an Internet-age miscellany, mixing composition, improvisation, and rock and roll; I've attended an Opera Omnia production of Monteverdi's "L'Incoronazione di Poppea" at Le Poisson Rouge, a new, classical-friendly club space on Bleecker Street; I've watched as the vocal ensemble Beata Viscera sang medieval pieces by Pérotin before a rain-soaked crowd in Damrosch Park, next to the Met; and I've taken in another of Mostly Mozart's popular late-night offerings—a deeply thoughtful performance, by Jeremy Denk, of Schubert's wintrily beautiful Piano Sonata in B-Flat. A new generation of American conductors, notably David Robertson, Alan Gilbert, and Robert Spano, is opting out of the one-masterpiece-from-each-column approach to programming, devising combinations of works that cut arrestingly from the ancient to the brand-new. Musicians are searching out fresh ways to play canonical scores and present themselves in public. Kenneth Hamilton is one of several pianists calling for a revival of Romantic mannerisms that have long been sidelined as vulgar: rolling chords, detaching melody from accompaniment, even improvising preludes to introduce major works. When Kriikku played Mozart the other night, he devised his own brief cadenzas, respecting period style while communicating his spiky, impish spirit.

The problem isn't that the modern way of giving concerts has grown hopelessly decrepit, as some say; it's that music has for too long been restricted to a single, almost universally duplicated format. If the idea is to treat composers as serious artists, then concerts must become significantly more flexible, in order to accommodate the myriad shapes of music of the past thousand years. Superbly polished as today's performances are, I sometimes get the feeling that the classics are a force more contained than unleashed, and that new works might still produce the tremendous effect that Beethoven had on Berlioz's old music master at a concert in Paris: "When I came out of the box and tried to put on my hat, I could not find my own head." ♦

THE CURRENT CINEMA

VIEW TO A KILL

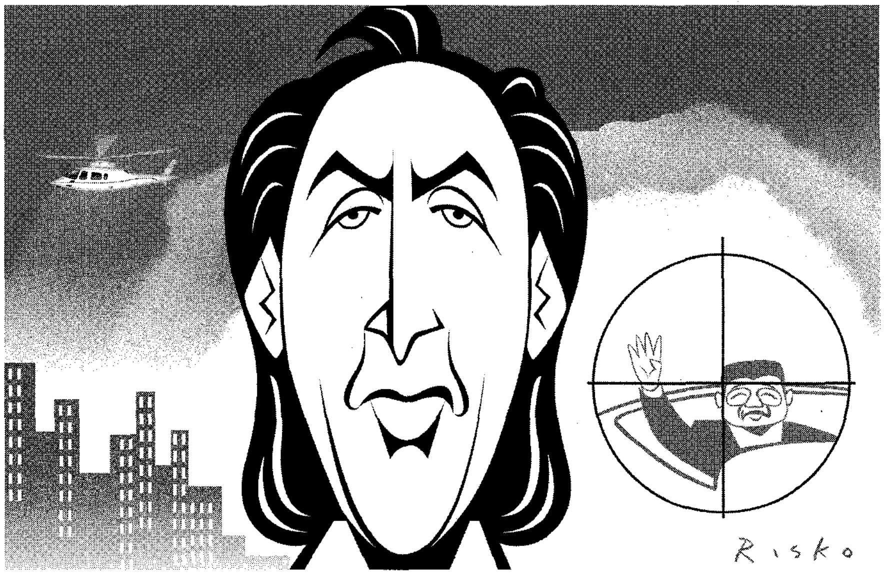
"Bangkok Dangerous" and "Mister Foe."

BY ANTHONY LANE

Movies are a brotherhood. Wherever you look, there are siblings fighting for space behind the camera. The heyday of the Taviani brothers may, I fear, be over, but we still have the Coens, who are on a roll. In the agonized corner, we have the Dardenne boys of Belgium, and, facing them, those naughty Wachowski kids from Matrixland. Soon, you won't be able to approach a studio without a blood relation in tow; look out for the long-lost Peregrine Eastwood and a delicate new project from Ang and Chuck Lee. In the meantime, here come the Pangs. Danny Pang and the rousingly named Oxide Pang are twins from Hong Kong, best known for their 1999 hit "Bangkok Dangerous." This they have now remade for the English-speaking market, titling it, after a lengthy period of reflection, "Bangkok Dangerous." The city is described in voice-over as "corrupt, dirty, and dense," in contrast to the characters, who are uniformly fair-minded, well scrubbed, and partial to quantum mechanics.

Nicolas Cage plays Joe London, which I strongly suspect of being an alias. He has a sheaf of passports at his disposal, together with explosive devices, a high-powered rifle, and other appurtenances of the discerning man-about-town. Joe is an assassin by trade, but then, these days, who isn't? Assassins are to the movies what plumbers are to ordinary life: they're trained, they're overpriced, they never call back, but sometimes they're just what you need. "Holiday," Joe says, when asked by Thai customs what he is doing in Bangkok, and his vacation plans include the murder of four men. To match that, he has four instructions for any aspiring killer: don't ask questions, don't take an interest in people outside the job, erase every trace of your presence, and get out when you can.

I can think of American Presidents who have followed these rules to the letter, whereas Joe proceeds to break them all. The last twenty minutes of the film, for instance, are taken up with an entirely superfluous diversion to a factory yard, where he takes the opportunity, rather than leaving the country, to waste as many of its citizens as he reasonably can. Earlier, he makes nice to the assistant in a local pharmacy and, in an unprecedented breach of homicidal protocol, invites her out to dinner. This is intended to demonstrate his softer side, just when we were getting used to the idea that he doesn't have one, yet his choice of date is a giveaway: she can't speak. Much the same goes for Aom (Panward Hemmanee), the dancer who acts as a link to Joe's employer, and who communicates mostly through her hips. In short, we are back in the territory of "The Departed." Martin Scorsese's Oscar winner, adapted from a Hong Kong original, was far superior to "Bangkok Dangerous," but it, too, tamped down the presence of women, as if they were a threat to its manly postures. In both cases, we are left with the unpalatable sense of females being welcome to join in, so long as they don't open their mouths.



Nicolas Cage is an assassin on holiday in "Bangkok Dangerous."

There was a time when Nicolas Cage, with his hangdog barks of irony, could have shouldered some of the women's work, mocking his own penchant for excess. Now, however, the more ridiculous his films become, the more seriously he takes them—and the more, presumably, he is paid to do so. The Cage of "Wild at Heart" and "Leaving Las Vegas" found life to be engrossingly weird, and treated it accordingly, whereas the Cage of "Bangkok Dangerous" intones a line like "There's a beer in the refrigerator" as if he were reading from the Book of Micah. He appears sunken throughout, understandably depressed by his long, ropy mane of black hair; from a certain angle he's a ringer for Chrissie Hynde, of the Pretenders. Only once does the Cage of yore flicker into view. It happens when Joe enlists the services of a resourceful thief, who introduces himself as Kong (Shahkrit Yamnarm). "Kong?" Joe repeats, with a smile and a drawl, as though wondering when the guy is going to stop fingering wallets and start climbing the nearest tower.

It would be heartening to report that the Pangs inject new blood into the action movie, a noble genre now verging on the anemic. But Hollywood and the television industry have long since sucked what they require from the tropes and rhythms of Asian films, and parts of "Bangkok Dangerous," far from seeming unfamiliar or freshly stylized,

ROBERT RISKO

offer nothing that you couldn't catch in an episode of "CSI." Traffic lights aside, the color scheme ranges all the way from dirty white to steely gray-blue, reinforcing the solemnity of the tale. Gunplay is intercut with closeups of bangled feet and floating lotus blooms, subtly indicating that it takes all sorts. And so the movie grinds on, diligently skirting every chance to surprise. As the brothers Pang export their brand of busy gloom around the world, following "Bangkok Dangerous" with "Moscow Expensive" and "Geneva Pleasantly Safe," is this what we can expect from the globalization of cinema? Will movies, wherever they hail from, end up looking the same?

The original title of "Mister Foe," when it opened in Europe, was "Hallam Foe," and that was a better fit. It's the name of the central character, played by Jamie Bell, and one thing he never feels like is a Mister. First, he doesn't turn eighteen until halfway through the movie; and, second, he hardly slots into society with the assurance—either the ease of body or the confidence of spirit—that would lead anyone to call him Mr. Foe. On the one occasion when a friend at work does use that term of address, it is said with a sour snarl, as if to caution Hallam not to grow up too fast.

If Master Foe has a foot in childhood, it's because he is half an orphan. His father, Julius (Ciarán Hinds), is still alive, but his mother committed suicide not long ago, and Hallam is wrapped in a wrathful grief. The Foes inhabit a large and lonely house by a loch, in the wilds of Scotland, and the isolation chimes with Hallam's mood; he crouches in a tree house on the grounds and daubs his face with makeup as if it were war paint. His prized possessions include a badger's pelt, which he drapes over himself so that his head is crowned by that of the beast, and one of his mother's dresses, into which he occasionally slips, for dead times' sake. Most vital of all are his binoculars; Hallam has forfeited his place in the world for a chance to spy on it. His chief victim is the brisk and beautiful Verity (Claire Forlani), who has usurped his mother in Julius's affections.

Hallam flees to Edinburgh and goes into a kind of upward free fall, seeking refuge not on the city's streets but on its empty roofs. He takes a job washing dishes in a fancy hotel, largely because the head of personnel, Kate (Sophia Myles), reminds him of his mother. Not content with that, he finds a perch behind the giant face of the clock in the hotel's eaves, camping out there at night and gazing across, through his trusty binoculars, at Kate's apartment, where she entertains her lover, Alasdair (Jamie Sives). From this vantage, Hallam creeps into her presence and, eventually, into her bed, she being—luckily for him, and for the plot's progress—one of those women who are able to declare, with a straight face, "I like creepy guys." The director, David Mackenzie (who also wrote the script, with Ed Whitmore), doesn't slide around the contrivances of the story; he greets them head on, hailing it as perfectly natural that women, far from being repelled by the Oedipal itches of his hero, should feel the urge to soothe them. That is true not just of Kate, who at one point sits with legs crossed, like Lorraine Bracco in "The Sopranos," and interrogates a naked, cowering Hallam about his desires, but of Verity, who reappears in his life and sums up its guiding goal: "How is it with your look-alike? Do you feel like you're fucking Mummy?"

Behind "Mister Foe" lies a bundle of Hitchcock highlights: "Psycho" is here, of course, in the son's contorted longings; "Rear Window" remains the template for all voyeurs; and there are whispers of "Rebecca" in the mysterious death by water of a first wife. Mackenzie is wise enough, however, not to try to ape the manners of the Master as well as his themes; "Mister Foe" is shifty and jolting to look at, immune to the charms of urbanity, and sprinkled with a rash of plaintive songs, courtesy of bands such as Franz Ferdinand, and drums that knock like heartbeats. Some of the best things in the movie zip by, as if to offset the earnestness of its main conceit: blink and you'll miss the blink of Kate's eyelid, framed in extreme closeup, as she fends off Hallam's question "Is Alasdair your boyfriend?" with the lying rebuff "God, no, he's got a wife and a kid." The vigor and saltiness of her couplings with Alasdair, like the dirty talk between her and Hallam, show that Mackenzie, the creator of "Young Adam" (2003), has lost none of his taste for the explicit. "Mister Foe" flirts too often with the unlikely and the foolish, yet there is something to admire in the nerve of its reckless characters, so uneasy in their skins. If you can't take sex or violence, be warned: there's no violence here, but the sex *looks* like violence, and that makes it doubly difficult to forget. ♦

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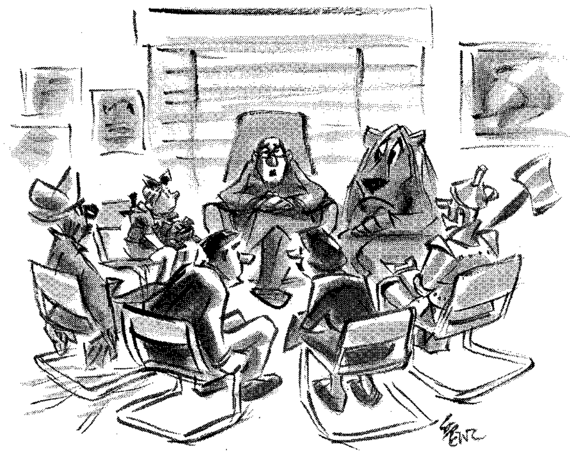
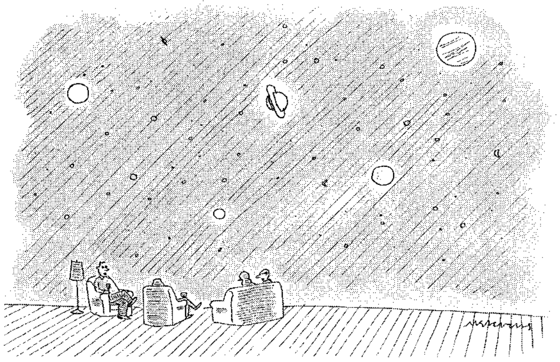


"And my hourly fee is six hundred dollars. You're not in Kansas anymore."
Bill Craig, Ridgewood, N.J.



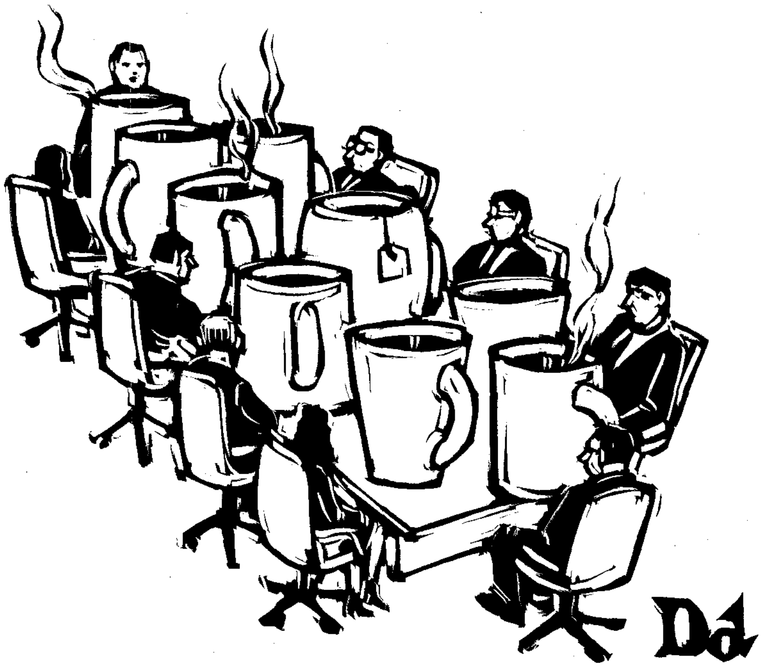
THE FINALISTS

"Five hundred billion galaxies and nothing's on."
Tom Elia, New York City

"Can I offer anyone a little more oxygen?"
Norma Allewell, Rockville, Md.

"See? Foreclosure's not all bad."
Janice Ambrose, Tucson, Ariz.

THIS WEEK'S CONTEST



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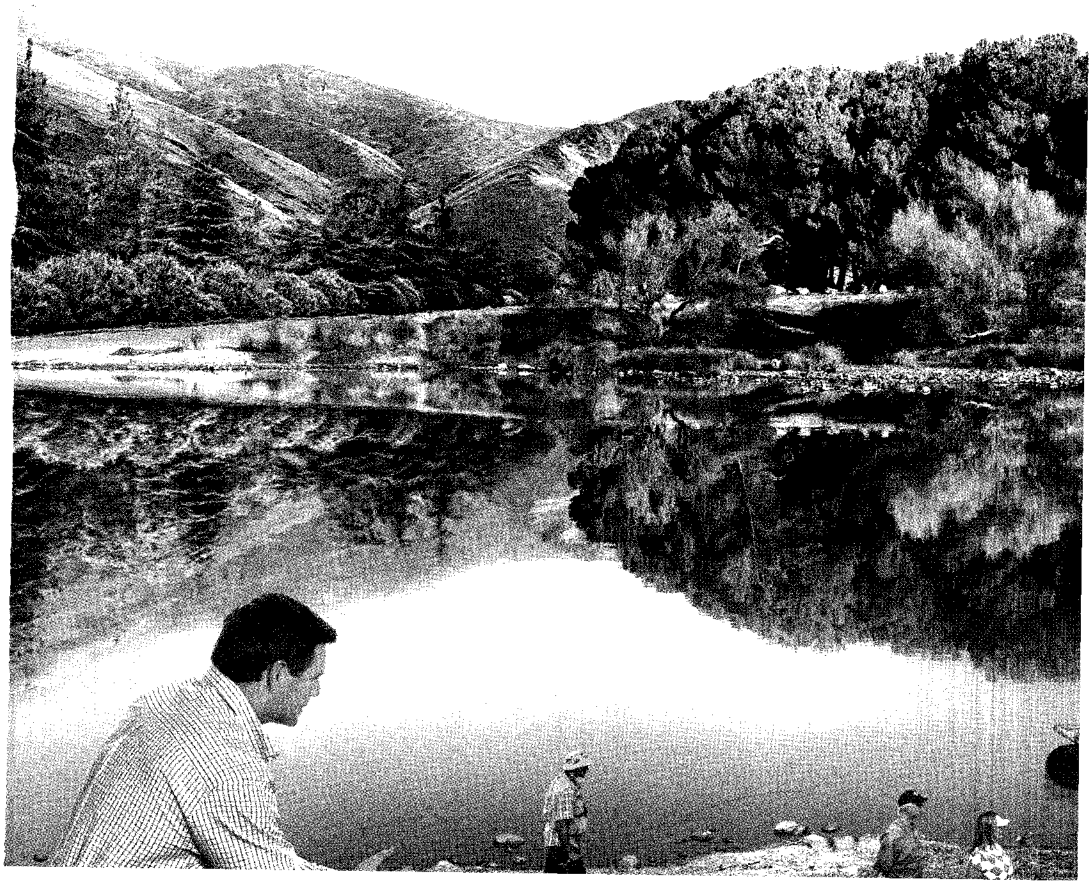
LET YOUR WORRIES GO.



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Total 2%
with Honey

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